

A MOIST SEEDY ENDIVOR :  
THE MAKING OF THE TORONTO SEED LIBRARY

A Major Project submitted to the Faculty of Environmental Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master in Environmental Studies, York University, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

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## Foreword

The focus of the research in my MES program at York University has been to understand the theoretical and substantive methods for transforming the contemporary dominant food system into one that is based on socially, economically, and ecologically sustainable production, harvesting, processing, and distribution methods. Consistent with the interests in my Plan of Study, I contend that while comprehensive national food policies may be the most effective means through which countries can achieve true food security, given our current policy environment, creating and implementing such a policy in Canada is not a realistic possibility any time in the near future.

The current model of agricultural policy making in Canada which prioritizes economic viability of the industry and its global competitiveness above the health and wellbeing of humans and other animals contributes to increasing – rather than reducing – food insecurity (Macrae, 1999). In addition to the lack of political will within existing political parties to change our agricultural policy making process, progress is further stunted by limitations on national sovereignty imposed by the trade rules of globalized food commodity markets (Friedmann, 1999).

Given its apparent futility in Canada's current policy environment and recognizing the urgent nature of the necessary changes, I decided to join the ranks of feed 'em fighters and peas keepers around the world who have given up on directly pressuring governments in favour of a more direct action-based approach to building a sustainable food system (Wekerle, 2004). The Toronto Seed Library project is exemplary of one of the many ways that food activists in Canada and elsewhere are responding to government failure at the most fundamental level of the food system: the seed. The cycle of sowing seeds, harvesting plants, saving some of the seeds, and then using them to produce the next crop is "the foundation of agriculture" (Kuyek, 2004, pg. 3) and thus the foundation of the food system (ibid).

In Canada, federal regulation and protection of the integrity of this process has been waning since the 1980s. It is being replaced with an increasingly privatized corporate-dominated model which lacks transparency and accountability, severely limiting the potential for sustainable agricultural practices, and threatening the social, economic, and physiological health of farmers and the population at large (ibid).

While attempts by civil society groups to convince the government to regain control of Canada's seed system have been largely ineffectual (Kuyek, 2007), decentralized efforts on a local scale including local seed libraries at which communities save and share their own seeds "offer an immediate and accessible alternative" means of achieving seed sovereignty, and by extension, the possibility of food sovereignty and food security (Thomas, 2012 pg. 1). Seed libraries can also serve as community hubs and platforms for educating the public about seed theory and practices as well as broader food systems issues (ibid).

Community seed libraries operate similarly to a conventional public library, but instead of stocking books they carry open pollinated vegetable, annual, and perennial seeds, with a special focus on rarer varieties of 'heritage' or 'heirloom' seeds and those best suited to particular local environments. My project consisted of examining why, how, where, and by whom seed libraries are created and operated; analysing documents and engaging with community members to determine which practices are best suited to our local context; developing a pilot version of the 'Toronto Seed Library'(TSL), and expanding upon it to build a network of seed libraries across the city.

## Section 1: Context

### 1.1 Food System Failing

It is now widely recognized that the contemporary global food system is characterized by structural weaknesses that threaten the ecological, social, and economic sustainability of our societies. The world-wide predominance of several types of malnutrition, degradation of the natural environment, and inhumane conditions for humans and animals alike offers overwhelming evidence that a fundamental restructuring of the food system is needed if people are to continue to survive and thrive (Lang, 2009). While purported technological ‘fixes’ to food system problems abound (functional foods, bio-fuels, genetically modified seeds, etc.), leading food systems experts argue that advances in technology will be sorely inadequate to address –and in fact may actually exacerbate – issues that have arisen not from inherent technical or economic limitations, but primarily from government failure (Lang, 2007; Roberts, 2010).

The food system in Canada “is increasingly implicated in creating the conditions compromising human and environmental health” (Macrae, Abergel & Koc, 2012, p3). The failure of our nutritional policies and programs has become clear as the nutritional health of Canadians continues to deteriorate. Levels of obesity are still rising even as more and more people struggle to get enough to eat (ibid). Since 2005, the number of people suffering from food insecurity<sup>1</sup> has grown or persisted in all provinces and territories (PROOF, 2012). According to a 2012 study, 4 million people, including 1.15 million children, lived in households that struggled to access the food they needed to maintain good health. Out of those households 336,700 were living at a level of deprivation experts define as ‘extreme food insecurity’ (ibid).

In addition, while modest improvements have been made in some agri-environmental conditions, others continue to worsen including greenhouse gas emissions and nutrient contamination of waterways (Lefebvre, 2005). Concerns about how this pollution from industrial agriculture

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<sup>1</sup> Food security is said to exist “when all people at all times have access to sufficient, safe, nutritious food to maintain a healthy and active life. Commonly, the concept of food security is defined as including both physical and economic access to food that meets people's dietary needs as well as their food preferences.” (World Health Organization, nd)

contributes to climate change, concurrently rising levels of hunger and obesity, food waste, the effects of GM technology and pesticide build up, on human, animal and soil health, loss of biodiversity, highly unsustainable water use, animal cruelty in and the human health effects of intensive meat and dairy production, unjust and unsafe labour conditions for migrant farm workers, and regularly occurring food safety scares among other reasons have made consumers increasingly apprehensive about how the Canadian food supply is being managed (Macrae, Abergel & Koc, 2012). According to a 2015 report by the National Farmers Union, Canadian farmers themselves are no less concerned (National Farmers Union, 2015).

Canadian agricultural policy continues to reflect a productivist, export oriented agenda rather than prioritizing ecological sustainability, human health and social welfare (Macrae, Abergel & Koc, 2012). Farmer autonomy and local control of land – what the National Farmers Union calls ‘the foundations of food sovereignty<sup>2</sup>’ – are under increasing threat. Significant changes have been made to agriculture related laws, policies, and institutions in Canada since 2010. These changes weaken farmers’ market power and increase farm costs while benefiting agribusiness corporations. For example, the destruction of the single-desk Wheat Board in 2012 – which occurred under the auspices of trade liberalization – has done severe damage to the prairie grain economy, compromising prices and equitable delivery opportunities (National Farmers Union, 2015). The threat of corporate control over seeds is also becoming increasingly serious, reducing farmer control of land and livelihoods even further. This makes it more and more difficult for farmers to make long term decisions that prioritize ecological and social sustainability over immediate revenues (ibid).

## **1.2 Why Seeds Matter**

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<sup>2</sup> “Food Sovereignty is the Right of peoples, communities, and countries to define their own agricultural, labour, fishing, food and land policies, which are ecologically, socially, economically and culturally appropriate to their unique circumstances. It includes the true right to food and to produce food, which means that all people have the right to safe, nutritious and culturally appropriate food and to food producing resources and the ability to sustain themselves and their societies.” (Grassroots International, n.d.)



Kloppenber (2010) states, “Who controls the seed gains a substantial measure of control over the shape of the entire food system”. Therefore, he argues that the achievement of ‘Food Sovereignty’ is largely predicated on repossessing ‘Seed Sovereignty’. Shiva et al concur, asserting that the fundamental importance of seeds cannot be overstated. Seeds, she asserts, “are the first link in the food chain and the repository of life’s future evolution” (Lockhart, Shiva & Shroff, 2012, p. 1). They explain that farmers – and women in particular – have been evolving and breeding seeds freely for thousands of years. Cooperating with each other and nature, they have increased diversity and adapted nature’s offerings to the needs of different peoples as cultural diversity and biodiversity mutually shaped each other in the process of creating and maintaining resilient food systems (ibid).

Today, Dr. Shiva argues, this ‘Seed Freedom’ is violently and directly threatened by science that is reductionist and mechanistic, and a legal framework that increasingly enables the profit driven privatization and commodification of seeds and seed knowledge. These two phenomena reinforce each other, destroying biodiversity, denying farmers their past and future innovation in breeding, and enclosing “the biological and intellectual commons” to create “seed monopolies” that will allow a small number of multinational corporations to gain control over life and society (ibid).

Since the Green Revolution the state-corporate industrial breeding industry has been obscuring farmers’ contributions to seed diversity and using political and technological tools including “High Yielding Varieties,” genetic engineering, “terminator seeds,” and most recently synthetic biology to consolidate this control over the seed. These technologies narrow agriculture’s genetic base and encourage monocultures of wheat, soy, canola, and corn varieties bred for response to chemicals as opposed to suitability for local conditions, nutrition, and taste (ibid).

Pierce (2008) notes that the standardized varieties produced during the green revolution have overtaken the world’s fields, replacing thousands of traditional varieties bred over time by farmers. The other major problem he identifies, is the collections of backup stocks of those varieties held in the world’s seed banks have been decimated in violent conflicts, natural disasters, government inattention, and ‘austerity’ measures (ibid).

### **1.3 The Corporate Seed Regime in Canada**

Kuyek (2007) confirms that this narrative holds true in the Canadian context. Kuyek traces the evolution of practices and policies in Canada relating to seeds. Borrowing from Friedmann and

McMichael's "Food Regimes" framework (Friedmann & McMichael, 1989,) he identifies three distinct "Seed Regimes" characterizing the Canadian Seed System since colonization. Control over seeds, he asserts, has passed from farmers to the state – and now to corporations.

Beginning in the 1980s, federal regulation and protection of the integrity of the seed growing, saving, breeding, and distribution process has been waning. While in many ways highly problematic, the State-run public seed system that began to take shape at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was well-accepted by farmers and the general public. Farmers were protected by the *Seeds Act* of 1923, participated in the variety registration committees, and maintained control of key functions including multiplication, distribution, and saving of seeds (Kuyek, 2007).

Many of these safeguards have been – and will continue to be – lost under the seed regime currently being constructed. The state is now actively transferring control to transnational seed corporations that are using privatized scientific research, intellectual property rights, patent law, international trade law, seed purchasing contracts, and other mechanisms to ensure that farmers are as dependent as possible on them for seed and thus that the entire population dependent on them for food (ibid).

Recent cutbacks in funding of public seed breeding programs and the passing of the Agricultural Growth Act in February 2015 have made the threat of corporate control over seed even more serious (National Farmers Union, 2015). Changes made to the *Seeds Act* and *Plant Breeders Rights Act* in accordance with the Agricultural Growth Act will put additional limitations on farmers' ability to save seed and lead to even more money being extracted from them at the point of sale of the seed and also at harvest and beyond (ibid).

Even when farmers are legally allowed to save and replant seeds, it requires them to take time and energy away from growing produce for sale. With all of the challenges farmers today face to remain competitive, for most, producing their own seeds is not a realistic option (Fuss, 2015). Corporate concentration in the seed market makes it difficult for farmers to access local or even domestic seeds. Thus, most farmers in Canada rely on commercially-produced seeds imported from abroad. Most seeds used in gardening now also come from one of the ten global seed companies now in control of 73 percent of the seed market (ibid).

Many independent seed companies that folks used to rely on are being bought up by multinational corporations, making it harder and harder for regular people to access organic, heirloom seeds that are not affiliated with Monsanto or other agribusiness giants (The Healthy Home Economist, 2013). Although genetically modified (GM) seeds have not yet entered the garden seed market, now that Monsanto has made available its first two patented varieties of vegetable seeds (Monsanto, nd), it is likely only a matter of time before GM seeds will begin to take over Canada's gardens, as they have many of our farms (Canadian Biotechnology Network, 2015).

#### **1.4 Civil Society Responses**

Since at least 1996, when the term 'food sovereignty' was first coined by La Via Campesina (International Peasant's Movement) (La Via Campesina, 2011), it has been the objective of that movement, as well as many other activists around the world, to oppose the corporate globalization of the food system (McMichael 2006; Desmarais, 2007 in Kloppenborg, 2010). Coming to the understanding that food sovereignty requires that the "control over plant genetic resources must be wrested from the corporations that seek to monopolize them and be restored to, and permanently vested in, social groups and/or institutions with the mandate to sustain them and to facilitate their equitable use" (Kloppenborg, 2010) has prompted many food movement actors to focus more specifically on the struggle for "Seed Sovereignty" or "Seed Freedom."

Around the world, people are engaged in campaigns to raise awareness and influence relevant government policies (e.g. Seed Matters, Canadian Biotechnology Action Network, Navdanya etc.); direct action (e.g. Occupy Monsanto, Unified Peasant Movement of Aguán etc.) and substitution strategies. Millions of seed keepers are involved in a growing effort to save and exchange seeds at a community level free of charge (Johnson, 2012).

In Canada, one of the oldest and most well-established groups working toward achieving seed sovereignty is Seeds of Diversity. Seeds of Diversity, originally called The Heritage Seed Program, was formed in 1984 under the umbrella of the Canadian Organic Growers Association. Now an independent charitable organization, they currently have several ongoing projects including Organic Seed Production, a member seed exchange, and the Canadian Seed Library (Conner, 2014). The Canadian Seed Library is a joint undertaking with the Bauta Family Initiative on Canadian Seed Security, which was launched in 2013 (Seeds of Diversity, 2013).

The Bauta Family Initiative on Canadian Seed Security's aim is to build a national movement to "conserve and advance seed biodiversity, keep seed in the public domain, and promote ecological seed production." They are working with farmers and partners to develop a diverse and resilient seed system in Canada. One of the many ways they do this is by providing monetary support for grassroots seed saving projects such as community seed libraries (ibid).

## **Section 2: Research Questions, Design & Methodology**

### **2.1 Research Questions and Objectives**

The research questions I set out to answer are as follows:

- 1) How many seed libraries exist currently in Canada, where are they situated, who are they run by, and why and how are they run?
- 2) What major challenges have folks running seed libraries faced and how have they responded?
- 3) What are the options – organizationally and/or physically – for where to situate the Toronto Seed Library (e.g. within the TPL system; a museum, university or other institution; a community centre or community food centre; the Toronto Community Garden Network etc.) and which is the most appropriate?
- 3) How can we best leverage existing community resources and to create and sustain the Toronto Seed Library?

#### **2nd Generation Questions**

- 1) If seed libraries become a fixture in cities across Canada, what are some scaling up and out implications for urban gardeners, urban farmers, and rural farmers, respectively?
- 2) If all or most cities had local seed libraries how (if at all) would the provincial and/or federal governments respond?

The objectives of my project were:

- 1) To engage and guide as many good food advocates and activists, gardeners, urban farmers, and other interested folks as possible around the city in a respectful and inclusive process to develop a pilot version of the Toronto Seed Library.
- 2) To create a collection of open-pollinated, non-GMO seeds and set the stage for providing reliable and accessible to it throughout the year in Toronto.
- 3) To provide a community hub and an effective platform for seed and food sovereignty education.

4) To make the pilot version of the TSL organizationally, socially and economically sustainable enough to ensure that other food movement actors have a strong basis to adapt and build upon far into the future.

In order to answer above questions and accomplish these objectives I utilized a combination of the following:

## **2.2 Document Analysis**

Prior to starting – as well as during – my fieldwork I conducted an ongoing review of documents related to seed libraries. Community seed libraries are a fairly new phenomenon: The first one in the US was created in 2000 and it took several years to catch on there (Thomas, 2012) and then spread to Canada where – at the outset of my research (January 2013) – there were only a small handful. A little more than years later, at the time of writing, Canada has at least 50 seed libraries, some with more than one branch. In addition, the first book on the subject of seed libraries in the Global North, *Seed Libraries and other means of keeping seeds in the Hands of People* by Cindy Connor, was finally published in December 2014.

Seed libraries, however, remain a largely unstudied phenomenon by academia and until the recent release of Connor's book, the limited information available was primarily found in "About Us" sections of websites, blog posts, and newspaper articles. From these online sources I learned about the development of local seed libraries including where, why, and by whom they were created, where they are situated, how they operate, how they are funded, and challenges they have encountered and how they have responded to these challenges. I also used this information to help discern the relative strengths and weaknesses of various models to determine which were best suited to the Toronto context.

## **2.3 Field work- Cooperative Inquiry**

From May 2012 up to the present I have been a Co-cultivator of Occupy Gardens Toronto, one of the groups through which the Toronto Seed Library project was initiated. I am the Co-founder of the Toronto Seed Library (TSL) as well as acting as Co-Cultivator from its inception. Thus from January 2013 onwards I have concurrently acted in both of these capacities as well as in the role of MES researcher. From January 2013 to December 2014 I was engaged in field work at which time I began a temporary

leave of absence from my role as Cultivator of the Toronto Seed Library to write this project report. My field work consisted of the following:

- Facilitating Public meetings (aka Gardeners Assemblies) held by Occupy Gardens Toronto and later the Toronto Seed Library
- Facilitating Private meetings (Cultivator's Meetings) held by Occupy Gardens Toronto and later the Toronto Seed Library
- Attending meetings of good food/urban agriculture/sustainability groups around the city
- Liaising with Coordinators other seed libraries, related groups (see above)
- Administration (data entry, updating internal and external calendars, typing out minutes etc.)
- Promotions (creating/consulting on promotional materials)
- Outreach (tabling at related events across the city)
- Planning and executing Toronto Seed Library events (branch launches, seed donation sorting and packing)
- Designing, coordinating and facilitating educational workshops (seed politics, seed saving, seed starting)
- Volunteer recruitment, training and mentorship
- Fundraising
- Organizing and participating in related political demonstrations (Seed-In at City Hall, Day of Action against GM Alfalfa, May Day, March Against Monsanto etc.)
- Internal communications (emails, Google docs, phone calls etc.)
- External communications (social media, writing newsletter, website design/content writing etc.)
- Editing the Seedy Zine- a quarterly publication by the Toronto Seed Library
- Creating visual presentations (power point, poster boards etc.)
- Presenting at conferences (Ontario Libraries Association, International Development UTSC etc.)
- Grant application writing/editing

My approach to this field work was guided by the principles of Cooperative Inquiry. With its roots firmly planted in humanistic psychology, Co-operative Inquiry is based on the understanding that all people are self-determining entities that make choices based upon their perception of the world (Reason, 1994). Because humans have this unique type of agency, special consideration must be taken to ensure that their role in the research is self-determined to an extent that they are not alienated from the inquiry process and from the knowledge which it produces (Heron, 1996). Thus, in Cooperative Inquiry all humans involved in the research "are both co-researchers, whose thinking and decision-making contributes to generating ideas, designing and managing the project, drawing conclusions from

the experience; and also co-subjects, participating in the activity which is being researched.” (Reason, 1994, p 6).

Reason posits that since we can only study persons when they are in active relationship with one another and where the research is generated by the researchers and participants in a cooperative context (1994, p.41), “the participatory process is essentially research *with* people rather than research *on* people” (Reason, 1994, p1). Accordingly, my research should be understood as a cooperative endeavor undertaken in the context of working relationships with the other Cultivators (Coordinators) of Occupy Gardens Toronto, the other Cultivators of the Toronto Seed Library, the many participants in both of these (overlapping) collectives, as well as dozens of other independent Toronto food movement actors and representatives of various organizations around the city.

The co-researchers/co-subjects of this study did not make up a set group of people. Occupy Gardens Toronto – the group through which the Toronto Seed Library project was initiated – is a movement of free association. It is a loose collective of people who participate to varying degrees at different times. This means that the people at the public meetings were not consistent, particularly for the first several months of research. For example, some folks came to a single Gardeners Assembly (GA) and never came back while others attended most or all of them. Whoever happened to be at a given GA had an equal say in any decisions made. There were, however, certain people, including my fellow Cultivators and several others, who were consistently present at private meetings (Cultivators Meetings) and who formed the ‘core’ team of co-researchers/co-subjects.

Throughout the process, key learning points from my document analysis, as well as my participation in various private meetings and public events were shared with all participants informally. This occurred on a regular basis at private and public meetings, by way of electronic updates sent over the list serve, as well as through social media. The other co-researchers/co-subjects, were also encouraged to both respond to mine and share the results of their own independent research over these channels. Thus the design and implementation process of this project was guided by a combination of findings from my document analysis and decisions made through group consensus building around creating, situating, and operating the Toronto Seed Library.

While it does not share Participatory Action Research’s (PAR) specific focus on unequal power relations and helping liberate populations oppressed by them, Cooperative Inquiry does recognize that for many reasons, people have more potential than actual self-determination (Reason, 1994). Systemic

barriers related to a person's class, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, (dis)ability, education level, mental health, and other socially constructed aspects of their identity can and do limit their opportunities to take an active part in being a co-researcher rather than a passive research subject. With this in mind, I made a strong effort to ensure participating in this study was as accessible as possible. While they were not always altogether successful, a sincere attempts were made to have a strong anti-oppression policy explicitly stated and enforced; hold meetings, workshops and events in geographically and physically accessible spaces; collaborate respectfully with already existing support programs run by and for impoverished, racialized, and new comer communities; offer promotional and educational materials in many languages; keep all seeds as well as all Toronto Seed Library events and workshops completely free of charge with some food provided and in a child-friendly atmosphere.

As a white, cis-gendered, able bodied, academic, throughout the development of this project I consistently struggled to 'check my privilege.' Financial and time constraints, as well as preexisting relationships with other food movement actors, made this more difficult at times. For example, while events and workshops were put on in most corners of the city, meetings were often held downtown rather than in areas that are more accessible to a wider range of people. This was done mainly so I could save the money (despite my class privilege I was cash-poor throughout the course of this study) and time of transiting to those areas and because I did not have as many connections with groups outside downtown, meaning booking (free) spaces there would have required significantly more time and effort. In addition, downtown is more accessible to the people I already knew that I wanted to be present based on their knowledge of and enthusiasm for the project (i.e. mostly relatively privileged folks like myself). In retrospect, the result of this was that, in general, relatively marginalized people were relegated to more passive participant roles rather than being active co-researchers in decision making.

In addition to the complex dynamics of relative privilege, my complete integration into the population of study as well as the multiple and overlapping roles I was playing further complicated my positionality within this study. While it gave me a unique ability to work with the study population as a familiar equal, avoiding the challenges that many participatory researchers face in situating themselves within the focus population, being so fully integrated in the population of study meant that there was negligible possibility for objectivity (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995). As expected – particularly given that most of my primary co-researchers/co-subjects were already close colleagues and friends – I found that my biases were quite evident in my written observations. I attempted to mitigate this by incorporating



what Cooperative Inquiry refers to as ‘critical reflexivity’ into my research process by acknowledging and articulating my evolving perspectives and biases in my field notes and research journal (Herr & Anderson, 2005).

I fell short at these attempts, however, as taking detailed notes and writing in my research journal on a consistent basis proved to be an unexpected challenge in itself as I struggled to decipher the functions of each of my roles and juggling all of their respective – and often conflicting – responsibilities. I usually had to choose between properly facilitating a meeting, event etc. or observing and taking detailed notes about what was happening at it. To mitigate this I ensured that there was always a minute-taker at meetings and though an inadequate replacement in terms of quantity and quality, cues from those notes were invaluable to my journaling process. Moreover, the multiple roles I was playing made it very difficult to find the time and energy to write in my journal as I constantly felt pulled towards the endless tasks of developing the Toronto Seed Library (see above). Along with my co-researchers/co-subjects, I worked countless early mornings and late nights to ensure that the first branch of the TSL was functioning in time for the 2013 growing season and after that to respond to the unexpectedly high demand for our services. We officially launched the TSL on March 6<sup>th</sup> 2013. In the first couple of months alone we were inundated by inquiries, offers to volunteer, collaborate etc. to the point where responding to emails, Facebook messages, and phone calls became a full-time job in itself, and the workload only grew from there.

At many junctures during the development of the TSL I felt it became too overwhelming, and as a result disorganized, and I wanted to –and sometimes attempted to – slow down and contain the process (ex. only attending events directly tied to the food movement rather than all of the more or less related events we were invited to table at, putting a moratorium on new branches until the existing ones were functioning optimally etc.). Due to my desire to see the TSL excel in its development as an organization and my time constraints related to balancing my role as Cultivator with my role as researcher I continually struggled to not exert too much influence over my co-inquirers and/or the research outcome. However, recognizing the importance of not completely dictating the outcome of my research I attempted to mitigate this problem, known as ‘reactivity’ (Herr & Anderson, 2005), by delegating certain key tasks, taking only a minor role in, and/or stepping aside completely from certain aspects of the project.

Thus I recognize that as a result of my conflicted position, at times my research process suffered because I was too focused on my role as Cultivator and also that due to my influence – or lack thereof depending on the situation – the TSL may have missed out on opportunities that presented themselves due to my role as researcher. However, it is important to understand that it was only through taking it on as my Major Research Project for MES that the creation and development of the TSL was undertaken at all, as there was nobody else willing and able to take the lead on it at that time. Moreover, as co-inquirers, the other organizers and myself shared a vested interest in the success of the TSL, so though at times I fulfilled less of an interventionist role than a Cultivator ideally should I am confident that overall my research will only benefit the TSL in the future.

Lastly, given the nature of collaborative nature of my research I recognize that the story of the Toronto Seed Library must be told from the perspectives of those involved. Therefore, rather than describing the TSL as a research subject ('it/they') and myself as the researcher ('I'), I will continue to refer to the group as a natural whole ('we' or 'us') throughout this report.

### **Section 3: About Seed Libraries**

#### **3.1 What are Seed Libraries & How do they Work?**

*Each new seed library represents a new, radically decentralized approach to food security. Those at the vanguard of the movement recognize the revolutionary importance in their work. No one is demanding any transparency or accountability from the big seed companies. More and more, the only way we will have any kind of seed sovereignty is by saving our own seeds and sharing them.*

*-Ken Greene, Founder of the Hudson Valley Seed Library*

Local seed libraries where communities save and share their own seeds are one innovative way that actors in the Seed Sovereignty movement facilitate seed saving and sharing (Thomas, 2012). Seed libraries differ from their closely related and more well-known relative, the 'seed bank,' in that their primary focus is not long term preservation, but dissemination of the seeds to as many people as

possible. Seed libraries help enable and encourage regular people to carry out *in situ* conservation<sup>3</sup> of plant biodiversity by providing seeds (almost always) free of charge<sup>4</sup> and educating people on why and how to grow plants for seed and save seeds (Biodiversity International, 2014)

The mission of community seed libraries is to bring seed saving and sharing into the mainstream; encourage seed saving and the exchange of seed history; encourage people to directly connect with the seeds that are growing their foods and take an active part in productive aspects of the food system; encourage biodiversity; offer an alternative to the (long distance, mass produced, sometimes genetically modified) seeds produced by large corporations; raise awareness and nurture the relationship between biological and cultural diversity; nurture new gardeners; exchange gardening information and build communities through seeds; provide a platform for seed/food/environmental education and to build community through seeds, bringing together people with varying levels of knowledge and experience (Mr. Brown Thumb, 2011; Thomas, 2012; Seed Matters, 2012)

Community seed libraries operate in the same fashion as any public library, but instead of stocking books they carry vegetables, fruits, herbs and flowers. The creation of seed libraries is based on the belief that, like books, seeds should be held in the commons. That is, that rather than private property, they should remain publicly owned and thus easily accessible to everyone (Johnson, 2012). People come to the library to borrow seeds, they plant the seeds, raise the plant, let some of it go to seed, and bring some of those seeds back to the library – ideally a larger quantity than what they checked out so that the library continues to grow.

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<sup>3</sup> "*in situ* means 'on site', so *in situ* conservation is the conservation of species diversity within normal and natural habitats and ecosystems. By comparison, *ex situ* conservation focuses on safeguarding species by keeping them in places such as seed banks or living collections" (Botanical Gardens Conservation International, nd).

<sup>4</sup> To the best of my knowledge the only entity calling itself a 'seed library' that has a paid membership is the Hudson Valley Seed Library which you will read more about in Section 3.2. In my opinion given the way it operates (it is done completely online and they do not expect returns on the seeds they distribute) it does not fall into the category of seed library and calling it that is a misnomer.

With the exception of genetically modified seeds, some seed libraries distribute any kind of seeds they happen to get donated, simply to encourage people to grow more of their own food. However, seed libraries primarily lend and receive donations of organic and open pollinated seeds, particularly heirloom or heritage varieties and those that are adapted to the local context. At first, most seed libraries purchase seeds to distribute and/or rely on seed companies to donate them, but the goal is to eventually create a self-perpetuating community collection. Since seed saving today is for the most part a lost art, in order for this to happen most seed libraries also help people learn how to actually save the seeds they are borrowing.

Ken Greene, founder of the second community seed library in the US, explains the importance of the seed library model, arguing that “The ultimate success of the seed diversity movement rests in the reeducation and involvement of the population at large” (Thomas, 2012). Just as traditional libraries help to facilitate mass literacy in general, seed libraries help to spread seed and food literacy (ibid). Almost all seed libraries engage in educational efforts related to the history, politics, science, and art of seed growing and saving. These include prominently displaying books on these topics to be read independently and/or organizing a ‘seedy book club’ in which people read the same book and gather to discuss it; providing informational hand outs, and hosting lectures and/or hands on workshops, sometimes using a demonstration garden. Native Seeds/SEARCH, a non-profit organization in the Southwestern US that has a particularly well-established seed library project, has scaled up its educational initiative to the level of starting a ‘Seed School’ where they run weekend and 6-day training courses “designed to offer a comprehensive yet accessible overview of the history, science, business, and craft of seeds”(seedsave.org, nd).

The majority of community seed libraries are located inside of public libraries. In addition to the aforementioned philosophical parallels between books and seeds, the actual physical space of libraries is very significant given that in the US and Canada alike, public libraries are some of the only indoor spaces that remain (to a large extent) in the commons: A public library is one of the last places in existence that everyone can access in order to get a drink, use the washroom, or just sit down and relax without being obligated to buy something (Conner, 2014). Some seed libraries go even further towards universal access by specifying that a person does not need a library card to borrow from the seed library, as acquiring a card usually requires government-issued identification and proof of current mailing address, both of which can be a barrier for many folks.

Libraries are well suited to hosting seed libraries for several other reasons as well. There is an array of educational materials readily available there, and libraries have a budget, as well as institutional power that can make it easier to access grants and other forms of funding. They are always evolving to stay relevant and suit community needs, and some libraries even have existing gardens on their grounds to use for demonstrations. Others have green space that can be turned into one. There is also a librarian already present who can act as the 'seed librarian,' although that can work more or less well depending on a given librarian's level of knowledge about and enthusiasm for the project. While librarians are often the initiators of seed library projects and some are keen on the idea immediately, others need to be convinced of their value. (ibid)

One of the most important things to remember when it comes to choosing a location for a seed library is that for there to be a reasonable expectation of getting any seeds 'returned,' it must be in a place where people already have a reason to come, like a library. Seed libraries do make their homes in other spaces, however, including universities; schools; community centres; nature conservation centres; churches and other places of worship; the offices of food justice and/or urban agriculture related charities, non-profits, and businesses; alternative libraries (e.g. tool libraries, kitchen libraries etc.) and other community hubs. Aside from –and often in collaboration with– librarians, seed libraries are initiated by a wide variety of entities including 'Transition' and other sustainability movements, gardening, permaculture and conservation groups, alternative libraries, student groups, citizen groups, land trusts, museums, Master Gardeners, other knowledgeable and enthusiastic individuals and more (ibid).

Funding for community seed libraries comes from an equally diverse array of sources including donations from users and patrons, universities, community funds, government grants, foundations and independent agencies, land trusts, and even private corporations fulfilling their 'corporate social responsibility' mandates. Seed libraries also have a lot of variation in the way they operate. Some are accessible all-year round while others open and close in accordance with the local growing season; some require you to sign up for a membership while others ask only for an email address to stay connected; some have limits on how many seeds you can borrow while others allow you to take all you want need; some are supervised by a seed librarian while others are self-serve and function completely on an honor system.

Among the things that most seed libraries do have in common is that they are nearly all located in a place where a lot of people will see them, including those that are not necessarily familiar with gardening, seeds, or the background issues that catalyzed the seed library movement. Seed saving itself, even on a personal scale at home, has at this point become a political act (Philips, 2008). When undertaken as a community and made visible as an alternative to the dominant culture in which both the sacred magic and the life and death imperative of saving and sharing seeds have all but disappeared, it becomes that much more impactful. As Nancy Conner (2014) concludes, the importance of declaring seed sovereignty in public as an act of non violent protest cannot be overstated. With each new seed library we carve out another space of resistance to corporate control of our food system and our lives.

### **3.2 History of Seed Libraries in US and Canada**

#### **3.2.1 Origins**

Though community seed banks and similar initiatives aimed at reviving seed saving/sharing, have existed in places across the world since at least the 1980s, the first to explicitly use the concept of a 'library' of seeds was created in 2000 at the University of California (Berkeley) by a student and activist named Sasha DuBrul (Thomas, 2012). It comes as no surprise that the seed library movement grew from radical roots. After participating in the anti-globalization demonstrations at the World Trade Organization that shut down Seattle for days near the end of 1999, DeBrul returned to California "charged with excitement." He had developed a new passion for seeds while working as an intern at a farm in British Columbia the previous summer and was beginning to realize the fundamental importance of diversity to the health of plant – and all other – communities. DeBrul was further inspired by the book *Enduring Seeds* by Gary Paul Nabhan, co-founder of Native Seeds/SEARCH and a pillar in the US local food movement, as well as the community-controlled movements undertaken by the Black Panthers (ibid).

An opportunity to make his ideas a reality came soon after when the University of California at Berkeley closed its campus CSA farm so that the property could be used for cooperative research on genetically modified corn with the Swiss biotech company Novartis. Along with his friend Christopher Shein, who had been running the farm, DeBrul took all the leftover seeds from storage and started the first seed lending library, the Bay Area Seed Interchange Library (BASIL) (ibid). Operating out of the nonprofit Ecology Centre, for nine months BASIL was a flourishing grassroots hub for seed saving and self-reliance in the Berkeley community. DuBrul, however, became ill and was unable to continue his

guidance of the project. Shein and a dedicated BASIL volunteer – j the aptly named Terry Compost – worked hard to keep this pioneering seed library active as an annual seed swap while DuBrul moved on to other endeavours (ibid) .

A few years later DuBrul had migrated to upstate New York where he was working on another small farm. In 2003 he met a young librarian named Ken Greene during a trip to the local Gardiner Public Library. They had a common interest in agriculture, and when Debrul told his new friend about BASIL, Greene’s mind immediately began to make connections between the worlds of books and seeds. The loss of genetic diversity, he realized, also meant the loss of the cultural stories that accompany them. He likened the way that books go out of print and disappear from circulation to how seed genetic diversity was rapidly decreasing as growers less and less sought out and cultivated unique varieties (ibid).

The solution suddenly became obvious to Greene and he soon proposed to his director that they add seeds to the branch’s catalogue. An avid gardener herself, the director agreed and the first seed library inside a public library was sprouted. The response from the community was tentative at first. Some folks were confused about seeing seeds in a library, but over time meetings, seed education workshops, and planting a seed garden out front of the library built up enthusiasm and got more people participating. The Gardiner Seed Library had been in operation for four years and had 60 active members in 2008 when Greene decided to move out of the city, and start seed farming full time (Bahrayni-Easton, 2014).

At that point, Greene and his business partner uprooted the project and decided to put the seed library online and call it the Hudson Valley Seed Library (HVSL). In the first year, membership grew to 500 people. In order to work full time on the endeavor, they made it financially sustainable by switching to a paid membership structure. For an annual fee of \$25 members are sent ten seed packs and are allowed to access an expanded ‘library’ collection. As of December 2014 the HVSL had over 1200 gardeners and farmers participating in an active seed saving community (ibid).

In 2005, the year after the Gardiner Seed Library was launched, the non-profit SPROUT (Seed and Plant Resources OUTreach) was established in West Marin, California. SPROUT is based in a downtown bookstore and also takes its operation on the road offering seeds, classes and seed saving resources (SPROUT, 2010). Three years later, the Portland Seed Library was created. Housed in the Northeast Portland Tool Library in Portland, Oregon, it appears to be the first seed library hosted by an

alternative library which is itself rather interestingly hosted by a Lutheran Church (Conner, 2014). By the end of 2010, two more seed libraries had sprouted: the Seed Library of Los Angeles (SLOLA) and the Richmond Grows Seed Lending Library (Richmond Grows) in Richmond, California (ibid).

Having never heard of Ken Greene's original seed library within a library in New York but inspired by a permaculture design course she had completed, Rebecca Newburn independently came up with the idea of making seeds more accessible by putting them in an actual public library. The highschool teacher teamed up with Catalin Kaser with the goal of creating a replicable model that others would be able to follow. The Richmond Grows offers extensive resources on their website on how to create your own seed library, which have now helped many seed libraries, including ours, get their start (ibid).

Over the course of 2011 and 2012, about two dozen more seed libraries were founded across the United States and by the end of 2012, the first three community seed libraries in Canada had been established.<sup>5</sup> The first was created in February by Erika Simms, Programs Coordinator at Richmond Food Security Society in Richmond, BC. The Richmond Community Seed Library operates out of the Main Branch of the Richmond Public Library. Their start-up was funded by a grant from the University of British Columbia. The library is open for borrowing from the end of March to the end of October and a travelling version also makes appearances at Seedy Saturday and related events during the growing season. Regular seed saving workshops are also offered during that period (Richmond Food Security Society, 2015).

In the summer of 2012, the Kerrisdale Seed Library was founded by a youth group under the leadership of Sheida Naderi-Azad, then-president of the Prince of Whales Community Garden Club

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<sup>5</sup> Since 2008 Seeds of Diversity (formerly Heritage Seed Program) has been working on a project called the 'Canadian Seed Library'. It is a collection of seeds that backs up the efforts of Canadian heritage seed companies and member seed savers. They store samples of some of the country's rarest (and less rare) seeds in low humidity freezers to ensure that they are viable for future gardeners and farmers (Conner, 2014). Thus, despite their name, they currently operate as seed bank. They chose to call the project a 'seed library' rather than a bank because their purpose is to keep these seeds part of the commons and they do intend to make the seeds more available to the public at some point in the future (Bob Wildfong, personal communication, 2015).



(PWGC Club) in Kerrisdale (a neighborhood in Vancouver, BC). The library is maintained by a core group of student volunteers from the PWGC Club and they exchange seeds with growers from a number of community gardens in the area (Naderi-Azad , 2012).

Right around the same time, the first community seed library in Ontario was launched. Grimsby Grows Seed Library was founded by Adrienne Charette, the librarian at the Grimsby Public Library. They host occasional beginner gardening workshops at the library and are open whenever the library is, ensuring year round access to free seeds to residents of Grimsby and the larger Niagara Region. They are funded by the Niagara Community Foundation (Grimsby Public Library, nd).

### **3.2.2 A Growing Movement**

*As we continue to watch the disappearance of diversity, consolidation of the seed industry, and unbridled, exponential growth of genetic manipulation, it is apparent that a seed library grassroots movement is among the best ways to create a parallel reality, one rooted in the ancient tradition of seed saving.*

*-Nancy Conner, Author, 'Seed Libraries and other means of keeping seeds in the hands of the people'*

Since the beginning of 2013, there has been a profusion of community seed libraries and similar grassroots seed sharing efforts across the US and Canada, particularly in Ontario and along the West coasts of both countries. According to seed library evangelist Rebecca Newburn, they have “gone fungal” (a slower more sustainable version of ‘going viral’) (Toppo, 2013). California is now home to at least 70 community seed libraries. A dozen more have been created in BC and in Ontario we now have at least 15 including the Toronto Seed Library (seedlibraries.net, 2015). Just over two years ago, in February 2013, when researching for my Major Research Project proposal, I was able to find an online presence for about 130 seed libraries in the US and Canada combined. According to the information Rebecca Newburn has more recently begun compiling, there are now approximately 50 community seed libraries operating in Canada and over 300 in the US. That totals over 350 seed libraries in the two

countries combined and counting all of the branches for those with multiple locations would take that number up over 400 (seedlibraries.net, 2015).

The first community seed library with more than one branch was founded in 2012 in Pima County, Arizona and now has 8 locations. Kent District Library Seed Library in Michigan now has 14 branches, all in public libraries, and many others in the US have 2 or 3. The Toronto Seed Library, which now has 18, appears to be the first in Canada to offer multiple branches and, from my analysis, is currently the only one with more than 3 locations (seedlibraries.net, 2015). Another first in Canada came in 2014 when Seeding Ideas, a seed library, was established at the Agricultural Campus of Dalhousie University in Truro, Nova Scotia: Seeding Ideas, which operates out of MacRae Library, is the first in the country to be directly funded by a university (Rogers, 2014). There are at least four university-funded community seed libraries in the US (seedlibraries.net, 2015).

It's difficult to say exactly why there has been such an upswing in seed libraries and similar initiatives in the last several years. I attribute it at least partially to a combination of the following: Rebecca Newburn's work developing and promoting resources that make creating a new seed library as easy as possible; growing awareness of the potential risks of genetic modification, terminator seeds and the like and a sense of urgency around removing/keeping these products out of the food system; ongoing efforts by libraries to adapt to the changing needs and preferences of their communities (Toppo, 2013); and an abundance of coverage on seed libraries in even the most mainstream and far-reaching of media outlets. In March, 2013, for example, stories about seed libraries appeared in both USA Today and on NBC Nightly News (Conner, 2014) and since then dozens of articles, blog posts, and segments have been produced in smaller and more niche newspapers, radio and television stations, and websites (Conner, 2014; seedlibraries.org, 2015).

Two new websites, both launched in 2014, the Seed Library Social Network ([www.seedlibraries.org](http://www.seedlibraries.org)) and [www.seedlibraries.net](http://www.seedlibraries.net), offer quick and simple ways to connect with seed savers and seed advocates across the US, Canada, and beyond. They also allow interested folks to keep up to date on developments in the Seed Library Movement including new seed lending library launches, news coverage, and innovative ways to deal with common challenges. In addition, seed savers, seed librarians, and other seedy folk from around the world will soon have an opportunity to gather in-person to share their stories. In May 2015, the first ever International Seed Library Forum will be held on

Tucson, Arizona, featuring speakers including Rebecca Newburn (the woman behind Richmond Grows Seed Lending Library, seedsaver.net and the Seed Library Social Network), Alan Greene (founder of the US's second seed library/first seed library within a public library), Nancy Conner (author of the first book on Seed Libraries), several other pioneers and pillars of the Seed Library Movement, and yours truly. I will be representing the Toronto Seed Library in a Roundtable discussion on strategies to increase access to seeds for low income and diverse communities, something the TSL has made strong efforts towards thus far and that we plan to prioritize more in the coming months and years. You will read more about this in Sections 3 and 4.

### **3.3 Seed Libraries and the Law**

#### **3.3.1 The US Context**

After being in operation only two months, in June 2014, the Simpson Seed Library, housed in the Joseph T. Simpson Public Library in Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania, received a letter from the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture (DOA) informing them that their activities may be violating state law. The organizers were shocked, particularly since they had gotten the approval of the local Penn State Agriculture Extension office before starting the project. The Seeds Act 2004, the letter explained, obliges anyone distributing seeds – which includes any person dropping off seeds at the library – to acquire a seed license, label the seed packages with their name and address, and “keep complete records (including samples) of each batch, for two years, in a place that would be accessible for inspection during regular business hours. Seeds would also have to be tested according to Association of Official Seed Analysts (AOSA) rules for germination” (Smith, 2014).

Soon after, library officials met with representatives from the DOA to discuss the investigation. The authorities explained their reasons for intervening, citing concerns about truth in labeling and consumer protection as well as the threat of agro-terrorism in the form of invasive species, cross-pollination, and poisonous plants (Creason, 2014; Seeds of Diversity, 2014). Since fulfilling the requirements to keep it operating legally was completely unfeasible, the library agreed to shut down the seed library. They are now allowed only to distribute seeds purchased from or donated by seed companies and to host one-day seed swaps where gardeners can exchange their own seeds (Landgraf, 2014).

The crackdown in Pennsylvania “is believed to be the first time a state has intervened in the growing seed-sharing movement” (Maher, 2014), but it certainly wasn’t the last. In September 2014 Duluth Public Library in Minnesota became the second seed library in the US to receive notice from the Department of Agriculture that their seed library program was likely violating state seed law. Just as in Pennsylvania, authorities, who delivered the news in person, stated that the program was not fulfilling Minnesota’s legal requirements around seed distribution permits, seed package labeling, and germination testing (Kraker, 2014).

Unlike in the Simpson Seed Library, however, the one in Duluth is still going strong. While it is unfeasible for the library to take the rigorous and cost-prohibitive measures required by the law, staff is still negotiating with state authorities to find an appropriate solution, which may include enforcing some sort of less formal smaller scale rules for germination testing. In addition, in November, 2014, Duluth City Council unanimously passed a resolution in support of seed saving and sharing in their city. They also plan on proposing changes in state seed law to exempt seed libraries. Legislators in Nebraska are also considering requesting a change in legislation to allow seed libraries to share seeds without cost or germination testing (Johnson, 2014). In the meantime, until the long term goal of actually amending state laws can be achieved, lawyers from the Sustainable Economies Law Centre (SELC) say that as long as seed libraries in the US are not selling seeds, nor requiring members to make any agreements about returning seeds, they have a lot of room to maneuver (Orsi & Thapar, 2014).

They explain that, though they differ significantly, every state has laws that require seed companies to have licenses, test seeds, and label them properly. At the federal level there are similar laws regulating seed companies that sell their products interstate. All of these laws, they argue, exist for good reason. Like other truth-in-labeling laws, seed laws, “keep seed companies accountable, prevent unfair competition in the seed industry, and protect farmers whose livelihoods depend on access to quality seeds. The testing and labeling of the seeds also helps to prevent noxious weeds and invasive species from getting into the mix.” In some states these laws only apply if you are selling seed. In others, like California, they also apply to bartering, exchanging, or trading it. In some states, including Pennsylvania, even supplying seed is regulated (Orsi & Thapar, 2014).

Orsi & Thapar (2014) believe that when it comes to seed libraries, both the letter and the spirit of these laws are being unjustly applied. By carefully going over the exact wording of the Pennsylvania

seed laws, for example, they have identified nuances that could provide legal justification for seed libraries in that state to hold their ground and continue to operate until regulators realize their own error, and to defend their activities if the matter is brought to court. In California and other states in which selling is broadly defined to include exchanging, bartering, and trading, one can make the argument that these laws are meant to be applied only in a commercial context in which profit is the primary motive. Since seed libraries have arisen out of a “give more” mind frame, they are motivated to act fairly and in service of their members and the community.

Since seeds are given and received on an informal basis with nothing but peoples’ own sense of responsibility forcing them to give anything back to the library, regardless of how much they get from it, “the letter of the law doesn’t tell us that seed libraries are clearly exempt from regulation, but the spirit of the law does” (Orsi & Thapar, 2014). The SELC plans to assist state legislatures draft measures that would allow seed libraries to function legally in the US, and in the meanwhile, they are gathering information about state laws to share with seed libraries, including compiling relevant sections in an online ‘Seed Law Tool Shed’ (Associated Press, 2014).

### **3.3.2 The Canadian Context**

In December 2014, Seeds of Diversity’s monthly newsletter assured us that when it comes to the Canadian context, seed libraries are completely legal. They explained that things are much simpler in Canada, as the Seeds Act and the Seeds Regulations make up the single federal law governing the distribution of seeds. The Seeds Act prohibits the sale of (and import, export, and advertising for sale) of seeds that don’t meet certain standards, but the Seeds Regulations exempt vegetables, roots, and herbs. Thus, as long as seed libraries are not selling field crops, they stated, we are quite free to operate without restrictions. There are specific standards for labeling and quality testing of field crops including grains, oilseeds and forages that are being sold, but they can be distributed legally as long as they are given or exchanged (Seeds of Diversity, 2014a).

However, this may not be the case for long. In February 2015, the Agricultural Growth Act (Bill C-18) received Royal Assent (Canadian Food Inspection Agency, 2015). Among many other changes to several federal agricultural laws, this omnibus bill amends the Plant Breeders’ Rights (BBR) Act. PBR is a form of Intellectual Property Rights that gives authority to the developer of a new plant variety to collect royalties on seed sales and/or restrict the use of those seeds for 18 years. Bill C-18 extends this period to

20 years and enables breeders to collect ‘end point royalties’ on whole crops at harvest, rather than on seed alone. This means farmers will be required to pay royalties on grain sales, hay crops and other harvests of PBR-protected varieties (Seeds of Diversity, 2014b).

Before the Agricultural Growth Act was passed, with the exception of patented seed technology (i.e. genetically modified seed) farmers in Canada could save any seed for replanting including PBR-protected varieties. This right has now been converted to a government-granted ‘privilege’ which can be removed by the government merely through regulatory changes. In addition, while farmers are still allowed to harvest PBR-protected seeds, they are under threat of legal action by the ‘owner’ of that seed if they save it in storage for use in subsequent years (Seeds of Diversity, 2014b).

It remains unclear exactly how these changes in the PBR Act will impact the legality of distributing grains, oil seeds etc for seed libraries and other community seed saving/storing/exchanging initiatives, or any other seeds for that matter. It is possible that gardeners may still be allowed to save, store and exchange PBR-protected varieties of field crops as long as there is clearly no intention to actually sell them. Since seed developers have primarily registered for Plant Breeders Rights on major commodity crops, seed saving of garden crops – which make up the majority of what most community seed libraries lend and borrow – have not yet been affected. The situation could change, however, if breeders (or their employers as is most often the case) begin to register fruit and vegetable varieties as well. What we do know for sure is that the Agricultural Growth Act puts the legal status of seed libraries into question, severely limits farmers’ rights and autonomy, and moves agricultural policy in Canada many steps further away from seed sovereignty and toward more complete corporate domination (Seeds of Diversity, 2014b).

## **Section 4: Field Work Reflection- Design and Implementation of the Toronto Seed Library Project**

### **4.1 Where We Began and Where We Are Now**

*“I feel like I’ve been pregnant for ten years and the baby is finally going to be born”*

– Maria Kasstan, *Seeds of Diversity Toronto*, December 2012 (upon hearing of our plans to found the Toronto Seed Library)

Inspired by the recently opened Toronto Tool Library, in November 2012 I and the other Cultivators of Occupy Gardens Toronto – a radical guerilla gardening collective inspired by the international Occupy Movement – had begun to discuss the possibility of creating a community seed library in Toronto. Quite fortuitously, under a month later we were invited to sit in on the Seedy Saturday Steering Committee meeting taking place at the Stop Community Food Centre where we had the opportunity to float the idea to a core group of Toronto seed savers and seed saving advocates. The response was overwhelmingly enthusiastic: “Yes!” they said. “Yes, please!” A community seed library, we were told, would fill a long-standing void in Toronto.

For years, they explained, one of the major frustrations for those organizing the annual springtime Seedy Saturdays/Sundays series had been that for the other eleven months of the year there was no established way to disseminate seeds and related knowledge to people in the city (Maria Kasstan, personal communication, December 2012). Though the Canadian Seed Bank Library is housed in Toronto, it does not provide seeds for the general public. Rather, it operates on a member-only basis, focusing on cooperating with experienced seed growers and savers as well as more seed bank- type functions like backing up thousands of seed varieties in long term cold storage

Given the apparent need, the strong show of support, and our own excitement about the idea, the following January at our next Occupy Gardens Cultivator’s meeting we decided to take on founding the Toronto Seed Library (TSL) as one of our 3 major projects for the year. I had previously spoken to my supervisor and determined that the TSL project was an appropriate fit for my major research work so I took the lead on it while my co-cultivators focused on our other endeavours. A week later, at our next Gardeners Assembly, we formed a Toronto Seed Library working group and in mid-February I and others from that group held the first public meeting with the specific agenda of discussing how to design and implement the TSL.

I began the meeting by sharing some of the research I had done on existing community seed libraries and after that, with the more than 35 other attendees, we began to discuss the possibilities for what a pilot version of the Toronto Seed Library could look like including where to situate it physically and organizationally, lending and borrowing rules, etc. We did not agree on much in those few hours, but did reach consensus that with the growing season fast-approaching and given our current lack of funds and access to an appropriate physical space, we should start off with a simple travelling branch. This branch would focus on outreach (i.e. familiarizing people with the Toronto Seed Library name as

well as the concept and functions of a community seed library) and helping to distribute seeds saved and collected by Seeds of Diversity to people at relevant events, and progress from there. And progress we did!

A few weeks later on March 6th, 2013, we officially launched the Toronto Seed Library and kicked off the Seedy Saturday & Sunday event series with a Seed-In (our own seedy version of the classic Sit-in) inside Toronto City Hall. In keeping with our radical roots we invited the media and all Toronto City Council members to join us for a guerilla – as we did not have a permit to hold an event on the premises – seed swap outside of the Public Library Branch on the main floor of what we had by then coined ‘Seedy Hall.’ Over 100 people attended including a few city councilors and the assistants of several other city council members. An article about the seed-in as well as a photo essay by John Bonnar were published on Rabble.ca, several others made blog posts about it, and someone we’d never met before that afternoon made a short video using footage from the event.

In the weeks following, it became clear that the TSL project was much becoming bigger than we had bargained for. We began to receive a heavy flow of emails each day from folks asking us to table and/or speak at their events across the city and/or to partner with them on gardening and seed saving workshops, requesting seeds for their personal and community gardens, inquiring about how we operate, what seeds we had in stock and/or seed saving best practices, offering to volunteer and/or donate seeds etc. What started out as one of Occupy Gardens’ three main projects for the year eventually became our sole focus as it required all of our organizing capacity and more. We were almost shocked by the enthusiasm and at times certainly overwhelmed by it, but it sure sent us a clear message that we were doing something right.

One of the emails we got during that period was from the folks at the Toronto Tool Library who offered to host a ‘branch’ of the TSL in their space in the Parkdale neighbourhood. We all agreed that it seemed like a perfect fit, so on March 21<sup>st</sup>, 2013 we launched our first on-location branch of the Toronto Seed Library. Immediately following, several other community groups reached out requesting to host branches and we soon realized that the question of where to situate the library had been answered for us: why choose one partner when we could forge many partnerships and create a network of seed libraries in different areas of the city?



The Toronto Seed Library has now established 14 on-location branches and 3 travelling branches in addition to the original for a total of 18 branches across the GTA. We have a 'Seed Cycle' (a donated bike and trailer) to transport our original travelling branch when weather permits and an office at FoodShare Toronto to work out of and house our seed collection. We have hosted/co-hosted dozens of educational workshops to increase seed saving knowledge and skills for people of all ages and have provide seeds and related resources at a minimum of 150 community events. We have distributed a total of over 80,000 packages of seeds to individuals and groups in Toronto and upon their request, have also collaborated with some of our users to send seed donations to their (respective) countries of origin, including The Philippines, Iran, Brazil, Spain, Zambia, and Uganda.

Concerned that incorporation may negatively affect our grassroots initiative yet being in severe need of funds to keep the project going, we also started a non-profit organization called The Seed Library Commons to gain access to a much wider variety of grants. We are currently poised to receive up to \$25,000 in funds from one company. We plan to put it toward finally providing one of our Cultivator's with part-time pay for his full-time work and opening a 'Seed School' which will train people in the history, politics, science, and craft of seed saving.

As we enter this new growing season we are very excited to be embarking on a multi-year pawpaw planting campaign aimed at educating people on how to plant, grow and care for North America's largest indigenous fruit. We are also looking forward to the upcoming 'Seed Saving 101' workshop series we are hosting in partnership with the Toronto Public Library (TPL) kicking off on April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2015 at the Parliament Street Library. We hope this collaboration will help to further solidify our relationship to the TPL and encourage librarians to advocate for hosting branches of the TSL or to create their own version of a community seed library within their respective libraries.

#### **4.2 Key Issues Explored and Important Lessons Learned**

In Appendix 2 you will find a detailed chronological record of activities undertaken over the course of the Toronto Seed Library project. Appendix 1 is 'highlight reel' which draws attention to some of our most important events and accomplishments. The following is a reflection on my experiences developing the project, including our major challenges, failures and successes, and their associated learning outcomes. All of the issues explored and lessons learned have some degree of overlap and

similar themes are repeated throughout. However, for ease of reading I have organized the 9 issues into 3 sub-sections: organizational considerations; functions and logistics and relationships with other bodies.

#### **4.2.1 Organizational Considerations**

##### **Issue: Accessibility/Diversity of Membership**

As discussed in my methods section, making seeds as easily accessible as possible was always – in theory, at least – one of our highest priorities. Our mission is to distribute seeds to anyone who would grow and try to save them, but for people who have enough money and know how to connect with them, ordering from heritage seed companies is another good option. We have always specifically wanted to focus on providing seeds and seed education to people who would otherwise not likely be able to acquire them. Our actual achievements in this area have been mixed.

I am proud to say that without exception we have ensured that all of our seeds and seed education initiatives are provided free of charge and that nobody is ever pressured directly or indirectly to make a donation. We do, however, charge money for TSL t-shirts and the Seedy Zine for fundraising purposes. Although it seemed necessary at the time, and it would have been impossible to create and distribute those items for free, I feel that the decision to participate directly in the monetary economy does to some extent compromise our strongly anti-capitalist values. There was discussion amongst the Cultivators about using a ‘gift economy’ model, according to which there is no set price for goods or services. Instead, they are offered for ‘free’ with the understanding that the recipient will reciprocate with an amount they can afford/that they feel represents the value of what they received. However, at least one of us – the one who paid for and did most of the significant work to produce the zine – felt it was too risky. He was concerned that we would not make enough money to cover his costs and/or actually raise any funds which we really needed at the time, and I couldn’t guarantee that we would, so that idea was put on the backburner as something we could come back to later.

Aside from economic accessibility, we have also made some attempt to ensure we geographically locate ourselves in areas that tend toward lower income and more diverse racial and

ethnic communities. We have been very successful at distributing seeds, holding educational workshops, and creating branches outside of the downtown core. However, in the earlier stages of the project we did not deviate from the habit of holding our meetings there exclusively nor did we do much to give notice of those meetings outside of our already-established community. This means that while we do serve marginalized communities, the project itself was developed and is run by mostly white, upper middle class, highly educated young people, which reproduces a very problematic power dynamic I had hoped to avoid.

We also put a lot of time and effort into recruiting people to translate a basic description of the TSL and how it works to reduce the effects of language barriers to participation. The document now exists in 7 languages in addition to the original English and has been sent out to people upon request. However, these translations are still not posted on our website nor are they available at all (or even most) of the branches, meaning their actual impact has likely been minimal.

Limited time due to significantly strained human resources and having only minimal funds available, are partial explanations for our lack of follow through, but I believe habit and privilege are also factors. We held meetings downtown because that meant we could save time and money on transit but if we're honest, it was also because it was just more convenient for us and that's what we were accustomed to. We did not discuss the issue and make a decision to prioritize our own needs, but we let it happen, precisely because we did not actually stop to think and talk about the potential impact the location would have on participation. If we had, we likely would have realized that to stay true to our professed values, we needed to do things differently. Time constraints also help explain why the translated documents have not been put up on the website or made available at all of the branches. However, given the countless other things we have been doing, there are many tradeoffs that could have been made to ensure that tasks which are key to fulfilling our accessibility mandate actually get done in a relatively timely fashion.

The main take-away from this for me is that it is truly our actions rather than our stated intentions that matter. We need to get past our default settings and really figure out what accessibility looks like when it comes to the various aspects of the TSL project, and we need to work to make those ideals more of a reality. If something is really a priority we must do whatever is necessary to demonstrate that in our follow through even when it is inconvenient, time consuming, uncomfortable etc.

## **Issue: Funding**

As noted by Cindy Conner (2014), “The Toronto Seed Library is a labour of love for the volunteers, who used their own resources to get it started” (pg 49). Conner is referring here to the fact that aside from the small amount of donations Occupy Gardens had accumulated before we began the project, all the start-up costs for the TSL were put (and remain to this day) on my Visa. It is possible that we could have found a way to acquire funds prior to starting the project, but we had such a strong sense of urgency to get it up and running before the first Toronto Seedy Saturday of that season that there was not time for that. Our costs at the time were also quite low.

Whereas most seed libraries need to purchase seeds at the outset, we had a small collection donated by Seeds of Diversity Toronto and a subsequent large donation by a company called Seeds of Change within the first few months of operation. We also received another even larger donation from them in the 2014 season. These donations, in addition to what we have received from individual seed savers, have meant that we have not yet had to purchase seed to distribute. Our costs have consisted mainly of seed envelopes (more expensive than one might imagine) which we needed to divide the donated seed packets, as they generally contain two to four times the amount needed for an average urban garden; transportation to and from events; printing and photocopying promotional and educational materials for outreach and workshops and other workshop supplies.

In addition to my personal investments, these costs have thus far been covered by donations to the TSL from the public and a \$1000 grant from the Bauta Family Initiative on Canadian Seed Security’s Public Access Fund which we received in the spring of 2014. Around that time it started to become clear that we needed more money. One of our Cultivators was working on the project full time, while he waited for permission from Citizenship and Immigration Canada to do paid work legally. Once he received it, in order for him to continue working with the TSL rather than seeking other employment, we needed to figure out a way to pay him, at least part-time. We had casually discussed registering as a non-profit or a charity before, but it had come time for a serious conversation.

Though charities generally garner more donations because they can issue tax receipts, we agreed that was not an option for us due to restrictions placed on political activities. A registered non-profit can only use a maximum of 10% of their budget on things the federal government deems ‘political

activities' which includes a wide array of undertakings, many of which the TSL carries out regularly. We felt it was imperative not to place such limitations on our current and potential future endeavors. The non-profit option seemed better as political activities are not restricted, and non-profits are eligible for a large variety of grants. It is still not ideal, however, as it requires a level of bureaucracy (a Board of Directors, records of meeting minutes, receipts for all money spent etc.) that we felt would make our day to day operations and decision making more complicated and less efficient. After doing some research online and consulting with our friends at the Toronto Tool Library (a registered non-profit), we decided to create a separate non-profit entity through which we could fund the TSL and other seed library related projects. In fall 2014, we applied for and were granted non-profit status for The Seed Library Commons.

We have since applied for several grants and have received tentative confirmation that we will be receiving at least one of them. If we are awarded it, the amount will be between \$15,000-25,000, which would be enough to pay out Cultivator, a part-time wage for one year or full-time for six months. In addition to the materials listed above and paying staff, funds received will go toward purchasing seeds if that becomes necessary, honorariums for workshop facilitators, and starting our Seed School project. We are still very new to the non-profit world and it remains to be seen how the addition of this new endeavor will impact our grassroots work. It has certainly added to our workload. Making a website for the organization and following the government prescribed procedures for a non-profit have further strained our already limited capacity. Scheduling board meetings, for example, has been disproportionately time-consuming. It took two different doodle polls and weeks of communication over email to find a time and place that worked for the minimum number of members required to be present. We hope, however, that the funding we are granted will make the time and energy we are putting into it worthwhile in the long term.

In retrospect, once we had come up with the idea for the TSL (Winter of 2012), it probably would have been more sensible to wait until the following growing season to actually launch the project. That would have given us almost a year to secure funding, recruit and train volunteers, and make a realistic strategic plan. To some extent, it was a sense of urgency about the necessity of preserving and rebuilding seed saving culture that pushed us to move so quickly. On the other hand, it was also unbridled excitement on the part of the founders and the larger community. Thus, while it seems more

practical in retrospect, it is difficult to predict if or to what extent that momentum would have been maintained had the project developed in a much slower, more systematic way.

### **Issue: Organizational capacity/sustainability**

One of the most challenging aspects of this project has been attempting to keep up with all of the work associated with developing it, particularly at the fast rate we have grown. This relates partially to lack of funding and the inability thus far to compensate people monetarily for their work. In well run organizations with paid staff, these problems related to organizational capacity and sustainability are less common. However, in my experience, many groups that are entirely volunteer run manage to do their work equally or more efficiently than some of those with paid staff. Thus, although certainly significant, I don't think the lack of paid positions is, or ever was, the most important issue. Our main problem is that we have ineffectively used our human resources, and while lacking paid staff exacerbated this problem, I do not believe it was the cause.

While many people have helped out and supported us in various ways, the bulk of the work for the TSL project has been carried out by five people. Three have had Cultivator (coordinator) roles with two others providing consistent instrumental support. This has at times led to severe burnout, problematic interpersonal dynamics within the group, and a negative impact on our health and wellbeing as a group and as individuals. This situation, however, is not due to a lack of willing volunteers. We have kept an ongoing list of folks who have signed up to volunteer that had a over a dozen names on it within the first month of operation, and has continued to grow. The problem has been that we have not put the time and energy necessary into training these people to carry out the necessary roles, so despite their willingness, they lack the competence and thus we rarely call on them for help except with the most basic tasks such as seed sorting and data entry. We certainly had the intention to train them, but rarely followed through. At least five times over the course of this project thus far we have held volunteer orientations at which we planned to prepare folks to take over some of the roles we were filling so we could confidently delegate to them. However, these volunteer orientations always doubled as seed sorting and packing events, seed gardening sessions, art builds, etc because we had so much other work we needed help with immediately.

The work bees/ volunteer orientations were always well attended. We consistently had at least 5-15 people working together on various tasks for several hours at a time. I've heard it said disparagingly so many times by people running organizations, projects, campaigns etc., that people are happy to help out with particular tasks, especially if you gather them together and make it fun, but that nobody wants to take on leadership or 'bottom-lining' roles that require taking on responsibility for an aspect of the project. I have learned, though, that a significant number of people actually do want to take on more independent roles but do not volunteer because they are not confident enough in their ability to carry them out properly. Thus, we cannot expect people to step up without providing the training, tools, and ongoing mentorship that most people need to get comfortable in a new role.

As is so often the case in the food movement, and in social movements in general, our sense of urgency about getting all of the little things done has obscured our view of the big picture. It has prevented us from slowing down enough to actually take the time and effort necessary to empower people to do the work we need them to do most. We have prioritized immediate over long term needs in a misguided way that threatens the sustainability of the project and that needs to change. At this point if any one of us decided to leave the project, became ill etc. we would be at serious risk of having to shut down a significant portion of our operations, at least temporarily.

The first job of a manager, they say, is to make oneself obsolete – that is, to make sure someone else can do your job, and more generally “to build systems that keep the operation running in the face of changing and sometimes unexpected circumstances” (Ward, 2013). Moving forward, I consider this our most important strategic priority. We are on our way to having a paid staff member and it is probable that within a year we may have two. These changes, along with the lessons we have learned from our mismanagement thus far, should help us better prioritize to ensure the long term sustainability of our endeavor.

#### **Issue: Rate of Growth & Strategic Priorities**

As noted in Section 4.1 our Toronto Seed Library launch event at City Hall got us a lot of attention and immediately after, there was a flurry of interest and enthusiasm from folks regarding – among other things – hosting branches of the TSL. Our only requirements for branch hosts were, and at this point still are, that they have certain documents we provided them (a bit of background on the project, directions for using the seed library, and an email list sign up) posted or otherwise clearly visible

near the seed library area and that they designate one person to act as an ongoing liaison with us. We would have enforced certain standards in regards to the values of the group (for example we would not agree to partner with groups we felt were sexist, racist, homophobic etc.) but fortunately that issue has not arisen.

We were so excited by the response that without really thinking about it or discussing it in depth, we quickly agreed to collaborate with any group that agreed to those stipulations. This meant that in addition to the original travelling branch we opened 7 other branches in the first three months without realistically considering the amount of time and effort each branch would require. We didn't realize until later how much work it would be to communicate with the liaison, make trips to the physical locations to restock them with seeds, enter all the new addresses onto the listserve as the email lists filled up, respond to the inquiries of folks who had borrowed seeds from all the different branches, co-host launch events, etc. Often we are not able to keep up with all of these tasks, which has had negative consequences including some branches being under-stocked, longer than reasonable response times to communications from liaisons, delaying branch launch events, etc.

In retrospect, rather than jumping at any opportunity, it would have made more sense to open one additional branch or possibly even a few, then see how that worked before opening any more. That would have given us an idea of how many more (if any) we had the capacity to properly support. I have also reached a similar conclusion about events that we participate in. There have been times when we were bringing the travelling branch to an event almost daily, some days splitting it up so that we could be servicing two events at once. Considering how much other work we had on our hands, this was/is not necessarily the best –or even one of the better – ways to spend our time. Rather than feeling that we should accept every invitation, I now feel we should have been/should be more strategic about what events we chose, focusing on those hosted by groups it was/is important to form strong relationships with, where we would get exposure in areas of the city we were otherwise unconnected with etc.

One major strategic error was putting a huge amount of time and energy from the start into connecting with city councilors. Our efforts were very successful in a sense. At the launch and during the week following, three different councilors set up personal meetings with us and many others invited us to their annual Environment Days. However, they were, in retrospect very misplaced. Though we had a



vague idea of rallying their support for the seed library and Toronto urban agriculture initiatives in general, we did not have a clear proposal ready for the councilors regarding what that support would or could actually consist of. Essentially the meetings amounted to us talking about the TSL, the councilors telling us what a great initiative it was, and sending us on our way. Councilor McMahon subsequently connected us through email with the head of the Toronto Public Library system, which could have helped create an important opportunity, but we did not have a proposal ready for them either, so the potential was mostly wasted.

The conclusion I've reached is that we grew much too quickly. The benefits of that quick growth were that we have introduced the idea of seed libraries, and seed saving in general to more people and distributed more seeds than I ever could have imagined. However, I don't think it is worth the missed opportunities, and the way it impacts the quality of our services and our personal stress levels. In the future, I feel that explicit strategic planning for short, medium, and long term goals should be undertaken and that we should work based on the general philosophy of doing less and doing it well.

#### **4.2.2 Functions and Logistics**

##### **Issue: Physical space/Storage conditions**

The collection of seeds we had when we launched TSL was fairly small. Our entire original 'travelling branch' including our banner, outreach and education materials, and a donation box fit snugly in the two large shopping bags we used to transport it. When we weren't using it, the branch was stored at one of our respective homes. While we liked the idea of having a physical space to work out of and store our materials, it was neither financially feasible nor necessary at the start. The situation became more challenging when we received a donation of 1500 seed packets from an organic seed company called Seeds of Change. The company connected with the urban agriculture community in Toronto through the Toronto Community Garden Network (TCGN), offering to donate all the seeds needed for the season. Along with the TSL, dozens of community gardens in Toronto put in orders and on a sunny day in April 2013 they came in a large truck to deliver thousands of packets of seeds, 1500 of which were given to the TSL to distribute. We stocked up all of our branches, and the remainder of the

seeds were stored at my home as it was centrally located. They took up a lot of my small space, and so it was inconvenient but not especially problematic.

That all changed when we received another, much larger, donation. Seeds of Change was ready to deliver us 75,000 packets of seeds. Although they were slightly passed their commercial sale date, the seeds were still viable so we were very happy to get this news. The only problem was that we had nowhere to put them. Since we were storing them relatively short term, refrigeration was not necessary, but we did need a cool, dry, pest-free place, centrally located – that would not cost us money – to keep the many boxes of seed packs. In Toronto, where space is at a premium, that was not easy to find. They ended up in a friend's (finished) basement, which was acceptable, but far from ideal in that basements tend to be relatively damp, which threatens the viability of the seeds. Also, whenever we needed to access the seeds we would have to predetermine a time to get let in the house which was inconvenient and time consuming. We made it work, however, for several months, until July 2014 when FoodShare Toronto generously offered us a year of rent-free office space at their building in Bloordale.

We were extremely excited about this as it meant that we not only had a place to store the bulk of the seeds, but also a home for our travelling branch and a place to work out of and meet at. The fact that it was at FoodShare, a very widely known and well respected food organization, made it all the more special. We had already partnered with them on events and workshops and we felt this would only strengthen our relationship. Indeed it has. We have worked closely with the staff and volunteers there to support each other's initiatives and have co-hosted many successful events and workshops.

The office already had a desk and most of a computer so we got the rest of the necessary hardware donated and have a cozy office space set up where regular 'office hours' are reserved for folks who want to browse for seeds and/or bring their questions and/or comments to a TSL Cultivator. We also hold most of our meetings there now. Though our original year-long lease will be up this summer, FoodShare has agreed to let us stay until they move out of the building which will be in summer 2016 at the earliest. This means we have at least a year to find another physical location. We have not yet begun to explore a range of options, but one thing we've hoped for is that FoodShare will become so accustomed to having us around that they will bring us with them to their new building wherever that may be.

Another even more exciting possibility is also being discussed. There is a collection of rare urban agriculture books that is currently being stored at FoodShare. The room it's in, unfortunately, has compromised air quality that is unsafe for humans (otherwise that would have been our office) so for a long while it has been without a librarian and thus inaccessible. Urban agriculture expert Joe Nasr, who played a major role in amassing the collection, is now an instructor Ryerson Centre for Studies in Food Security. He is looking into the feasibility of getting the books into the Special Collections & Rare Books department of the Ryerson University Library & Archives. His vision is having the TSL located on site as well, ideally with Brendan (one of our Cultivators, who is also an experienced urban gardener and a graduate of the University of Toronto iSchool) as the librarian for both the book and seed collection.

At some point in the not-so-distant-future, we will have to start looking into other options as well. It would be sensible to have a space lined up well before FoodShare's lease is up. I would like us to approach this transition in an uncharacteristically strategic and timely fashion and plan to try to impress the importance of this upon my co-cultivators. Like so many aspects of this project, when we were offered the donation by Seeds of Change, we spontaneously said "yes" and dealt with the consequences later. We accepted the donation knowing that we did not have a place to store that amount of seeds. As a result, they ended up in less than ideal conditions. However, the small potential risk of damage to the seeds was completely worth the benefit being able to distribute thousands of packages of seeds that we did not have to pay for. Thus, though it would be of great benefit to the TSL to be more organized, strategic, and realistic about our capacity, we also would have missed out on some very special opportunities if we had not acted spontaneously. Finding a better balance between these two approaches is one of my ongoing challenges and goals in this project.

### **Issue: Quality and Quantity of Seed Donations/Returns**

Since we began the TSL project we have acquired an exceptionally large quantity of seeds without purchasing them or soliciting donations. To start us off, we were given a small collection by Seeds of Diversity Toronto and additional seeds from an Orillia-based farmer, as well as several other seed savers in our community. Near the beginning of the 2013 growing season, we received a donation of 1500 seed packets from a seed company, and the following year they gave us an additional 75,000! We have been stocking the shelves of all of our branches with these seeds ever since, and we'll have enough to distribute until the end of this year's growing season. After that, however, we will need to get

more seeds. There is a chance that the same company or a different one will donate to us again next season, but we cannot count on that, especially with so many other seed libraries and gardening initiatives popping up that may seek seed donations. Assuming we get some funding by then or are able to make enough in monetary donations, we will also have the option of buying seeds from one or more of the local heritage seed companies, as most seed libraries do for at least the first few years. While it would mean using some of our much-needed financial resources, the positive side of that option is that we would be directly supporting those companies with our dollars, and promoting the business when we credit them as our seed suppliers.

The aim of seed libraries, however, is to eventually not have to rely on ‘professional’ seed savers, but rather to build a self-perpetuating collection of seeds saved by and for the community. Thus, one of our most important roles is to help create the conditions under which this will be possible by reviving seed saving culture. Returns to seed libraries are typically low, especially when they first open, for several reasons. Due to the extreme consumerism that characterizes contemporary society, people are much more accustomed to and comfortable buying things rather than producing them. While growing one’s own food has never entirely gone out of favour, it has only recently been gaining widespread popularity again in the US and Canada, especially among young people and in urban areas (National Gardening Association, 2014). The resurgence in seed saving is even newer (Conner, 2014). It takes time to raise awareness, and to get through to people and help shift their frame of mind. Moreover, even most experienced gardeners, including those who grow food, are not skilled at saving seeds.

This is why education is a primary focus of the TSL. In order for us to get people saving seeds and bringing them back to the library, we need to teach them both why it is important and also how to actually do it. Thus far we have been diligent in following through with our education mandate, consistently providing folks with educational resources for self-guided learning and holding frequent workshops, usually with a hands-on component. We are hoping to soon begin scaling up our efforts by starting a Seed School based on the SEARCH/Native Seeds model in the US, which holds one-day and six-day intensive training courses in all aspects of seed saving.

I am very excited at the prospect of creating a Seed School because for all the reasons outlined above, I feel it is urgently needed. At the same time, realistically, it will be a huge endeavor that will take significant time and many types of resources. My concern is that our current organizational capacity will

not support us being successful while maintaining our existing operations. Taking on this project will mean a restructuring that I am not sure we are ready for. Thus, I feel that developing the Seed School should be a longer-term goal and that we must not rush into it before carefully considering all the factors. We need to approach it in a much slower, more deliberate way than we have any other aspect of the TSL's development.

In addition to education, one innovative way that some seed libraries encourage people to save seeds and return them is through incentive programs. The TSL has not yet explored this practice, mostly because we have had such an abundance of seeds to distribute, that returns have not been especially salient. However, I think the idea has a lot of potential and is something that warrants serious consideration as we move forward. Based on lessons learned through other aspects of this project, before setting up any kind of program like this, I would communicate with sister seed libraries that have implemented one and find out what kind of impact their programs have had. Online research uncovered no information to this effect and the only book on seed libraries mentions using incentives in passing.

The same can be said for almost all aspects of seed libraries. While the *Seed Libraries* book and online sources describe various operating models, there are almost no recorded sources of information about the outcomes of any of the different models. At this point, best practices can only be guessed at without extensive personal communication with other seed library organizers. This can be partially explained by the fact that most seed libraries are still in their early stages of development, however in my experience, this is a common problem in social movements in general. A key learning from this is the importance of keeping records, which for the most part we have neglected to do. Without records, project and program evaluation is extremely difficult, and if we are not able to evaluate, we miss out on learning from the experiences of others, making it much more likely we will repeat their mistakes and vice versa. I believe it stems largely from that same sense of urgency that I have mentioned several times. We are so focused on doing the on the ground work that we believe will accomplish our goal that we feel like keeping an account of what we're doing and evaluating our efforts are not worth our limited time. However, we don't realize how much time and energy we could save others later by figuring out if what we're doing is actually having the intended impact and how it could be done better.

The quality of the seed donations we have received has varied. On occasion we have been given special rare heritage varieties lovingly preserved by devoted local seed savers, but the majority of our seeds have come from Seeds of Change. When we first got the donation offer from Seeds of Change, we

were hesitant. It seemed counter to the aims of the project to be distributing seeds from a multinational corporation. However, once we did some research, we realized how fortunate we were that they had found us. Seeds of Change is a US-based company that started out as a small independent venture with the mission of preserving biodiversity, but was bought out by a multinational in 1997. They carry only organic seeds, including many heritage varieties and have signed on to the Safe Seed Pledge<sup>6</sup> making a guarantee that they do not sell any genetically engineered seeds. They go on to specify further that they do not carry any Monsanto owned varieties. Almost all of their seeds are open pollinated varieties.

Thus, aside from the fact that their seeds are grown all over the US (i.e. are not locally adapted to Toronto), they meet all of the other ideal standards that seed libraries are striving for. The only other issue with the quality of the seeds is that the second time they donated to us, the seeds were one year past their commercial sale date. However, while their germination rate will be lower over time, when stored properly – these are hermetically sealed – most seeds remain viable for at least several years past that date. We have done ongoing germination testing with good results, and have had only one single report of a low germination rate from a TSL user. As a person who tends to think and feel in extremes, the lesson for me in all of this was that many things that are not perfect are still more than good enough. While remaining principled and paying attention to detail are extremely important, holding onto rigid standards in terms of ethics or technical considerations often does not actually serve the higher purpose we are working towards.

#### **4.2.3 Relationships with Other Bodies**

##### **Issue: Relationship with Canadian Seed Library**

Though Occupy Gardens Toronto had collaborated with the Toronto chapter of Seeds of Diversity long before we initiated the Toronto Seed Library project, we were somehow unaware of the Canadian Seed Library Project. I remember hearing about it for the first time at a Toronto Urban

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<sup>6</sup> A voluntary pledge signed by many seed companies and other seed growers, savers and sharers: "*Agriculture and seeds provide the basis upon which our lives depend. We must protect this foundation as a safe and genetically stable source for future generations. For the benefit of all farmers, gardeners and consumers who want an alternative, we pledge that we do not knowingly buy or sell genetically engineered seeds or plants. The mechanical transfer of genetic material outside of natural reproductive methods and between genera, families or kingdoms poses great biological risks, as well as economic, political and cultural threats. We feel that genetically engineered varieties have been insufficiently tested prior to public release. More research and testing is necessary to further assess the potential risks of genetically engineered seeds. Further, we wish to support agricultural progress that leads to healthier soils, genetically diverse agricultural ecosystems and ultimately healthy people and communities.*"

Growers meeting soon after we had started developing the TSL and being confused and briefly concerned that what we were doing was ‘reinventing the wheel’ so to speak. Very quickly though, I realized, that the folks at Seeds of Diversity Toronto we consulted with about the TSL would have let us know if that was the case.

When we looked into it, we learned that despite its name, Seeds of Diversity’s Canadian Seed Library (CSL) does not actually function as a seed library. Executive director Bob Wildfong explained that the ‘seed library’ title was taken to reflect the intentions of the organization to hold these seeds in the commons and to eventually make them available to the public. As quantities of certain seeds increase the CSL makes them available to experienced seed growers and other seed banks to replenish their stocks. Recent adoption of several ‘orphaned’ seed collections, mostly with low germination rates, forced their priorities even further in the direction of rescuing small amounts of diverse and endangered varieties before they are lost rather than collecting large enough quantities of particular varieties to provide to the public. Therefore, though by choice they would be a seed library, by urgent necessity they are now, and will remain indefinitely, a seed bank (Bob Wildfong, personal communication, 2015).

Thus, while we share a similar name and overarching purpose, and are both Toronto-based, our activities are complementary rather than overlapping. We are ‘on the ground’ providing seeds to the general public, which includes a rare experienced seed saver, but primarily consists of folks with no or very little seed saving ability. A large proportion of the people we distribute seeds to are only beginner gardeners who have never even considered the idea of saving seeds. We are inspiring people to become interested in growing and saving seed, providing the seeds and helping to train the next generation so that in the future there are still people with the knowledge and skills necessary to join the ranks of Seeds of Diversity member seed savers. And of course, whenever we receive donations of what we believe may be an endangered variety, we turn it into the Canadian Seed Library for more expert examination, growing, saving, and storage.

For now, this type of relationship makes sense. However, we also believe there is a lot of potential for more direct cooperation in the future. This could take many forms. One idea we have discussed is collaborating on the Seed School project. For example, if we are eventually able to implement a 6-day intensive program similar to the one offered in the US, it could include a tour of the Canadian Seed Library and a lecture on the work they are doing. Upon graduation, students could

receive a one year Seeds of Diversity seed saver membership and/or we could implement an internship program through which graduates of the Seed School do a placement at the Canadian Seed Library.

### **Issue: Relationship with Small Heritage Seed Companies**

It was during the very first Seedy Saturday the TSL participated in that we began to consider our relationship with small heritage seed companies. We were sharing a table with Seeds of Diversity Toronto, at which were displaying a prominent 'Free Seeds' sign, when I looked over and noticed Urban Harvest (a Toronto-based organic heirloom seed company) had a table just a few feet away. I wondered then if the owners of Urban Harvest and similar companies would consider us competition and feel threatened because we were providing something for free that they were trying to get people to pay for.

Soon after, we broached the subject with one of our Seeds of Diversity Toronto collaborators. Maria explained that Urban Harvest is owned by veteran seed freedom advocate Collette Murphy and assured us that Collette would view the TSL as a complementary as opposed to competing endeavor. We were introduced to Collette that day and indeed she expressed her strong support of the project. Her response was echoed by other vendors present that day and on subsequent occasions when we were in similar situations.

Companies like Urban Harvest, Cubits, The Cottage Gardener, and most other locally or regionally based heirloom seed businesses here and elsewhere, share a common goal with seed libraries. They are less motivated by profit than by the mission of protecting and increasing plant biodiversity, creating a robust regional seed system and resisting multinational corporate oligopoly over seeds. Moreover, though similar, we do not offer the exact same product in that – at least for now – we cannot offer the same quality guarantees nor nearly as many locally adapted organic heirloom varieties. These are things that the many discerning gardeners and seed savers, who have enough money to do so, will pay for.

Many of the folks the TSL provides seeds to cannot afford to pay the premium for organic heirloom varieties – or for any seeds at all, for that matter. Also, even many novice gardeners who have enough money are hesitant to pay for seeds because they are not confident in their growing abilities and don't want that money to go to waste. Thus, the vast majority of those who 'borrow' our seeds are folks who would not otherwise be buying them from a company. In addition, many people, even



experienced gardeners, do not have the time for and/or interest in saving seeds themselves. It is rare that someone like this, who has no intention of trying to save seeds, will take seeds from the TSL. We have found that most people behave in just the opposite way, being hesitant to borrow seeds from us because they are unsure their attempts to save the seeds will be successful.

If anything, the way that the TSL makes seeds and seed saving more visible to the mainstream public potentially has or will garner new customers for these companies. We also actively refer folks to them when we don't have what people are looking for. Thus, small seed companies in the area seem to consider to TSL a friend rather than a foe, and vice versa, and so we all peacefully coexist. Urban Harvest even hired Brendan, one of the TSL Cultivators, to work for them part-time this past summer.

One very important lesson I (re) learned from this is to always remember that our work is not being done in a vacuum. Before embarking on an endeavor we must consider how it fits in with and the impact it may have on other groups and individuals working toward similar goals. This lesson (UNCLEAR) is equally applicable when examining the TSL's relationship with the Canadian Seed Library. We should have known about it earlier. The reason we did not was because at the time it did not have an online presence and we were relying too heavily on the internet for research rather than using knowledge and experience of the people we were already or could have easily connected with. Although we did receive pre-approval for the project from the Seedy Saturday/Sunday Steering Committee, we should have made an effort to familiarize ourselves more deeply with the seed saving community in Toronto and to ensure we developed the project strategically in the way most beneficial overall to the context we were working in.

#### **Issue: Relationship with the Toronto Public Library**

Off and on over the course of developing the TSL we have considered proposing some type of official partnership with the Toronto Public Library System (TPL) and/or the Toronto District School Board (TDSB). For many reasons including potential ideological conflicts, limited capacity, and the amount of bureaucratic hoop-jumping it requires, we have not yet gotten around to making a formal proposal to either. The closest we have come to something like that was in October, 2013, at a meeting of Toronto City Council's Parks and Environment Committee. The committee had met to discuss motions related to the Toronto Agricultural Program and we made a deputation, asking them to consider a pilot seed library program within the TPL as one way of supporting new urban agriculture policy and programming.

We have not received any feedback on that proposal from City Council or the TPL, which is not surprising, as the proposal was not very strategically targeted. City council does not have authority to implement specific programs in the library system. The TPL has its own board of directors to make such decisions. Based on this fact, we were not expecting any direct tangible outcomes from the proposal. However, we felt it was worthwhile just to get it on public record and make the Committee aware of the TSL and our willingness to collaborate on scaling up urban agriculture in Toronto. Also, City Council does make the decision about whether or not to approve the TPL Board's operating and capital budgets, so the deputation, we thought, may help with buy-in by council members if the TPL were to one day include seed libraries in their proposed budget.

Despite having no official ties, we have developed a relationship with many libraries in Toronto. We started by connecting with a couple of individual librarians with links to the food movement. Word spread from there and, upon request, we have since hosted about 25 educational workshops at various public libraries on an informal basis. We also have a Seed Saving 101 workshop series coming up this season, with an event at a different public library every Saturday for 8 weeks.

In February 2015, one of our Cultivators attended a TPL Public Budget meeting. One of the topics of discussion was the TPLs support for alternative libraries. There he learned that later this spring the TPL will be teaming up with the Toronto Tool Library to open a branch of the tool library in Downsview Library. After the meeting Brendan spoke with Anne Bailey, Director of Branch Libraries at the TPL, about the possibility of housing a branch of the Toronto Seed Library at that location as well, as a pilot before implementing a joint program more widely. Ms. Bailey expressed enthusiasm about the possibility, and let us know through a subsequent email exchange that she would be in touch at the end of February to set up a meeting. We have not yet heard back from her. However, we are not discouraged. We are optimistic she will get in touch with us soon, and in the meantime plan to speak with our friends at the Tool Library about how they approached the partnership so we can be as prepared as possible when we speak to Ms. Bailey next.

As discussed in Section 3, there are many benefits to having seed libraries located in actual public libraries. For all of those reasons we are excited at the prospect of this partnership. The only major hesitation we have is in regards to our ideological stance and related political activities. While I believe that all seed libraries are by their very nature political, many are not as overtly so as ours. As noted in Section 4.1, the TSL was born out of a guerilla gardening collective, well known in the city as the

‘radical’<sup>7</sup> wing of the Toronto food movement. It has always been of the utmost importance to us not to stray from these radical roots so we will need to ensure that any partnership we enter into with the TSL will not compromise our ability to stay true to our values. This would mean the TPL would need to understand and accept that the TSL endorses, participates in, and organizes events that are extremely critical of the dominant oppressive power structures that exist in the city and beyond. These activities are sometimes of questionable legality and have occasionally been in outright defiance of the law.

It is understandable that an institution like the TPL would not agree to partner with us based on these facts. Although that would be disappointing, it wouldn’t be a crisis for us. In the event that an agreement cannot be reached between us, our role could be to consult with the TPL on how to start their own seed library and/or help set them up with a different food and/or seed movement group in the city to partner with, whose values theirs would be more aligned with. The main goal is, after all, to have as many seed libraries as possible, whether they are officially part of our project or not. We have made efforts toward an official partnership despite this potential clash, mainly because of mixed opinions among the Cultivators. I have never been very enthusiastic about the idea of an official pairing, feeling that an informal relationship like the one we have developed so far is likely the most suitable. However, as I have mentioned, one of our other Cultivators is a librarian by profession, and he is very excited by the prospect of merging his two worlds in a way that benefits them both. Our third Cultivator is ambivalent, and thus, we have compromised.

#### **4.3 Scaling Up and Out: Implications for Urban and Rural Food Growers**

The Toronto Seed Library is already in the process of adding 2 more branches to our existing 18. After that, it is our intention to continue to expand our operations, although at a slower, more sustainable rate (as discussed in previous sections). We will also continue to provide guidance and support to other fledgling community seed libraries in the GTA and beyond. However, the growth of the seed library movement does not depend on us – nor any other single person, group or organization.

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<sup>7</sup> The term ‘radical’ here refers to the traditional notion of radical as counter-hegemonic (i.e. those who advocate for fundamental political, economic and social reforms by direct and often uncompromising methods (dictionary.com, nd)

One of the great things about community seed libraries is that they are relatively easy to create. Depending on the model you choose, they can require very little space, money, and/or time. This means that most groups or individuals, with the will to start a seed library, can find a way. The Richmond Grows Seed Library was specifically designed to be an easily replicable model, and its founder has also created and made freely available, an abundance of helpful resources. Webinars on how to start a seed library are also offered semi-regularly.

Three seed libraries in the GTA that are not formally affiliated with the TSL have already sprouted, and the opportunity continues to exist for other folks in the City of Toronto, the GTA and beyond, to create their own community seed libraries. Seed libraries, as you have read, can be located almost anywhere. While high-traffic public areas are ideal, just about any place that doesn't get too hot, bright, or damp, can be a seed library's home. There are even a couple of travelling seed libraries in the US, that spend their off time inside of people's houses for guests to peruse. The number of seed libraries that could potentially be created then, is limitless, and with each new seed library comes new people who are learning why and how to grow and save seeds.

The question is: how big does the seed library movement have to get before it really challenges the dominant system at more than just an ideological level? How many seed libraries, distributing how many seeds, to how many people would this take, and how much does that depend on what types of people and where they are located?

Currently, community seed libraries serve small scale growers, mainly home and community gardeners. Particularly in urban areas, and even in suburbia, most growers do not have enough space for grains and oilseeds. Thus, food growing in cities tends to produce a limited range of things relative to the full dietary requirements (R. MacRae personal communication, 2015). However, increased vegetable production, especially of heritage varieties, itself could potentially significantly increase food security based on improved nutritional outcomes. It is very difficult to know how much. It is equally difficult to predict how much seed libraries do and/or how much they may be able to reduce dependence on corporate seeds, as when it comes to both gardening and seed libraries, we are lacking qualitative data.

We do not know how many gardens are being grown in Toronto, the GTA or in Canada nor do we know how much food or how much seed they are producing. We don't know how many seeds seed libraries lends, or how many come back. Statistics from the US may shed a bit of light in the topic: The

National Gardening Association (2014) reports a 17% increase in food gardening in the US between 2008 and 2013 with 35 percent of all households growing food at home or in a community garden; Seventy six percent of those with a garden grew vegetables, a nineteen percent increase; households with an income under \$35, 000 increased their participation in food gardening 38 percent, and there has been a 29% increase in food gardening by people living in urban areas.

If we are experiencing a comparable surge in food gardening here -which I believe we are- and the seed library movement keeps up the momentum it has had for the last few years –which I believe it will- , this could mean a lot more people growing, saving and sharing seeds, potentially even so many that sales of corporate vegetable seeds significantly decline. This affect would be even more pronounced if Toronto and other cities were to incorporate seed libraries into larger-scale urban agriculture initiatives.

Numerous cities across the country provide at least some form of support for urban growing. In Toronto, adoption of the Toronto Agricultural Program by City Council in 2013, provides an ideal opportunity to connect seed libraries with more serious, larger-scale urban growers and giving seed saving serious municipal visibility. Urban agriculture initiatives proposed for Toronto include roof-top gardens and greenhouses, fruit orchards, and more. For community seed libraries in more rural areas, significant opportunities exist to scale up if they are able to grow their numbers and get larger- scale market gardeners and farmers involved.

One possibility if a significant proportion of people stop buying corporate seeds in favour of borrowing from seed libraries, is that retailers may be the ones who notice the shift before seed corporations are even aware. Perhaps that will motivate them to advocate for changes in the Canadian seed system, taking some of the pressure of civil society groups (R. Macrae, personal communication, 2015).

Another possibility is that the government will prevent the movement from ever getting that big. As discussed in Section 3.3, changes to Canada's federal legislation related to seed saving and distribution under the corporate seed regime have made the legal status of seed libraries in Canada uncertain. As the direction of Canadian agricultural policy continues to facilitate the concentration of power over seeds in the hands of a small number of corporations, at some point community seed

libraries will likely experience some pushback, and we may have to go take our seedy activities underground.

## **Appendix 1: Making of the Toronto Seed Library- The Highlight Real**

### **WINTER 2012/13**

Screening of Bitter Seeds first public introduction of TSL idea, Gailbraith Building U of T  
Seedy Saturday Steering committee meeting where we first broached the subject with other speedsters  
First Cultivator's Meeting Hart House Map room  
First seed library working group Gardener's Assembly, Hart House Debate room  
First official Public Seed library planning meeting at Steelworkers Union Hall  
Banner unveiling & First TSL Seed Saving Workshop at Hart House partnered with Dig In UofT Campus Ag

### **Spring 2013**

TSL Shout out from Dr. Vandana Shiva at her OISE Talk  
Our First Seedy Saturday ever, Scadding Court  
Interview with Grid TO (TSL first time in the mainstream news)  
First donation Seeds of Change  
TRY Library Conference poster presentation  
Day of Action Against GM alfalfa  
Seed Library Meet up with Markham and Vaughn at North York Public Library  
Toronto Seed Library Traveling Branch Launch @ Seedy Hall event  
iSchool Inforum, University of Toronto Branch Launch  
Toronto Tool Library, (Parkdale "West Side") Branch Launch  
PermacultureGTA Travelling Branch Launch  
New College @ The University of Toronto Branch Launch  
Regenesi @ York University (Keele Campus) Branch Launch  
High Park Nature Center (High Park) Branch Launch  
Church of Saint Stephen – in – the – Fields (Kensington Market) Branch Launch

### **Summer 2013**

Home Grown National Park Traveling Branch Launch  
Website launch

### **Fall 2013**

Seed Freedom Convergence and MAM  
Deputation about TSL & Toronto Agricultural Program to Parks and Environment Committee  
Toronto Tool Library & Makerspace (Coxwell & Danforth "East Side") Branch Launch

### **Winter 2013/14**

Green Gardeners @160 Bartley (Scarborough) Branch Launch  
Seeding of Eden Event

### **Spring 2014**

Received grant \$1000 The Bauta Family Initiative on Canadian Seed Security Public Access Fund  
Seedy Zine Launch @ May Day, Allan Gardens  
Native Seed Specialist Traveling Branch by Friends of the Rouge Watershed Launch

**Summer 2014**

Moved into office at Foodshare  
Got Seed Cycle  
Harvest Noon @ The University of Toronto Branch Launch  
Toronto People With AIDS (Moss Park) Branch Launch  
OISE Library Branch Launch  
OCAD University [OCAD Students Only] Branch Launch  
Visit from Micahel Hale, Executive Director, Biodiversity International  
Second donation from Seeds of Change

**Fall 2014**

Submitted case study for Biodiversity International Book (to be published Spring 2015)  
Panel speaker at Eastern Canada Seed Growers Conference  
Community Action Resource Centre (West Toronto) Branch Launch  
Registered The Seed Library Commons as a non-profit

**Winter 2014/15**

Daily Bread Food Bank Branch Launch  
Referenced in new book about seed Libraries "Seed Libraries and other ways...."  
Ontario Libraries Association poster presentation  
Kick off of Paw Paw Campaign



## **Appendix 2: Making of the Toronto Seed Library- Detailed Time-line**

### **2012**

#### **November**

29- Screening of Bitter Seeds first public introduction of TSL idea to community

#### **December**

5- Seedy Saturday Steering Committee meeting

### **2013**

#### **January**

6- Idea for seedy zine (inspired by Toronto zine library – Stop Line 9 Rally)

9- Cultivator's Meeting Hart House Map room

10- Gardener's Assembly Hart House Debate room

14- Scadding Court seed packing with Maria and Krista

29- Filmfest with Dig In, Seed swap and original short film fest

#### **February**

2 Really Really Free Market tabling Campbell Park

3- Creating Permaculture event at Alternative Thinking

4- TYFPC Meeting representing

5- R Bee Keeper's Association Meeting at Trinity St. Paul's

7- Gardener's Assembly

10- Cultivator's meeting

11- First official Public Seed library planning meeting

13- York University Maloca Gardens Gardening Fair

18- Cultivator's Meeting

24- Karma Co-operative GMO Dilemma event

27- Art build (made first banner) First TSL Seed Saving Workshop at Hart House partnered with dig in

#### **March**

1- IRIS Planet in Focus Film Fest

2/3- IRBE Gift Economy Charles Eisenstein Tabling, Seed swap

4- Livestream UN Right to Food Secure Canada at Robarts-

6- TSL Launch aka Seed In @Toronto City Hall

7- Seed Packing event- Foodshare

8- Vandana Shiva OISE shout out to TSL

11- Gardens for World Peas event & Cultivator's meeting

12- Gardeners Assembly @205 Richmond St. #7415

13- Spring Seed Starting Workshop by Young Urban Farmers- 111 Jarvis St (MIA)

14- Free public lecture- From "Feeding the World" to Sustainable Farming by Harriet Friedman  
@University College- Room 144 (MIA) AND Seedy Zine Meeting

15- Cultivators Meeting @ OISE 5th Floor Lounge

16- Seedy Saturday @ Scadding Court AND interview with GRID TO (first seedy Saturday ever)

18- Meeting with Seedy Councillor McMahan; Robarts Seed In aka iSchool Branch Launch; Cultivator's Meeting AND Food and Spirituality at New College

- 19- Eric Holt Gimenez Metro Hall public event-
- 20- Seed in @ York University Centre
- 21- TUG Meeting, Justice For All meeting + El Contrato showing at PPGTA, AND Toronto Tool Library Parkdale Branch Launch
- 22- Allan Gardens greenhouse Kids seed starting AND Migrant Workers Alliance for Change- Action at Ministry of Labour
- 23- Parkdale/ West End Seedy Saturday
- 24- Seedy Sunday North York
- 25- Cultivator's meeting OISE fifth floor lounge
- 27- Seedy donation trip to Brampton from Scadding Court to Seeds of Change AND Sky Garden planning meeting, seed swap
- 28- Dig In Annual Spring Shindig,

## **April**

- 1- Cultivator's Meeting
- 2- Meeting with Wong-tam AND Steel workers NO more GMO's – start of Toronto NON GMO Coalition
- 3- Seed In @ U of T Gailbraith building Sky Garden
- 4- Z-day Gabor Mate tabling and Jacob speaker
- 5- Meeting at Foodshare with Joe Nasr etc to tour rare book library, discuss cooperation etc; tabling at Toronto Guerilla Gardener's Meeting Church street community centre; Seedy Prep Party 530-930 Art build for GM alfalfa Day of Action at big carrot
- 6- Winchester community Garden seed donation and Ward 8 Environment Day
- 8- Josh Matlow meeting seedy hall
- 9- National Day of Action against GM alfalfa, tabled AND Cultivator's Meeting
- 10- Cultivators meeting @ New College
- 11- Hosted Seed Library Webinar At PPGTA AND PPGTA Branch Launch
- 12- Eastern GTA Ecosummit UTSC Sustainability Office, Scarborough tabling AND Food For Thought event George Brown tabling
- 14- Seeds of Change Delivery to Scadding Court
- 15- Cultivator's Meeting 5<sup>th</sup> floor AND Gardener's Assembly OISE 2212
- 16- Permaculture design meet-up Scadding Court Garden
- 20- Alexandra Park Fruit Tree PLanting
- 23- Ontario Community Garden Network Meeting at Foodshare AND Cultivators Meeting
- 24- Seed In New College Branch Launch at Community Garden kick-off
- 25- Remembering our Roots event tabling at OISE Auditorium
- 26-28 Toronto Spring Convergence PPGTA, representing

## **May**

- 1- May Day Queen's Park, Tabling
- 6- Cultivator's Meeting
- 7- TRY Library Conference poster presentation
- 9- Seed Library @ Let's Get Growing: Food Action Community Engagement (FACE) 20 Gordonridge Place Scarborough
- 10- Gardeners Assembly @ Scadding Court
- 13- Seed Library Meet up with Markham and Vaughn at North York Public Library
- 16- Volunteer Orientation and Work/play bee (gardening, seed packing/labelling) at Scadding Court
- 18- Ward 13 Environment Day Lakeshore blvd and Ellis Ave

19-outreach at HomeGrown National Park event (launch of that group?)  
20- Regenesys York Branch Launch  
23- Volunteer Orientation and Work/play bee (gardening, seed packing/labelling) at Scadding Court  
24- High Park Nature Centre Branch Launch  
25- St Stephen's Branch Launch AND March Against Monsanto- spoke  
28- Work/play bee (seed sorting, labeling) @ Scadding Court

## **June**

11-Cultivstors Retreat Kearey Moreland Farm Orillia  
14-Cultivators Meeting my house AND UNEARTH Spiritual Solutions for Sustainability Bhakti Lounge  
Dundas st east  
27- Work/play bee seed packing labeling, gardening, volunteer training at Scadding Court

## **July**

6- HomeGrown National Park Branch Launch  
14-Outreach Community Garden Festival in Scarborough  
18- Seedy Release, basic seed saving and CD Release Scadding Court then Detour Test Their Logic  
19-Cultivators Meeting at Gerstein Library U of T

## **August**

7- TUG meeting  
9- TSL Cultivators Visioning Meeting  
16- Cultivators Meeting at Gerstein Library U of T  
21- Cultivators Meeting at Gerstein Library U of T

## **September**

4- Tabling OCAD U Frosh Orientation AND tabling at East side TTL opening  
15- Jacob speaking about TSL Collingwood public library  
19- Lawrence Heights Harvest Festival- seed swap  
26- Transition Toronto Seed Saving Workshop at TTL

## **October**

5- Seed Saving Workshop for Landslide @ Markham Museum 'the farm' talk about seed saving Jacob  
The Farm (garden in front of apple orchard) at the Markham museum, 9350 Markham Rd, Markham (@  
16th Avenue  
7-Cultivator's meeting  
9-Toronto Food Policy Council Meeting  
12- Seed Freedom Convergence /March Against Monsanto  
16- Jacob spoke Organic Council of Ontario Dinner and Discussion about TSL  
17- World Food Day Regis College Jacob speak represent TSL  
20- Commuity Food Gardening Workshop 5 , Lawrence Heights Community Centre  
22-Cultivator's meeting  
23- Deputation about Toronto Agricultural Program at city hall  
24- Dig In Garlic Planting Workshop Hart House AND Healthier Communities Symposium u of T Jacob  
speak - i Ka Shing Institute at St. Michael's Hospital  
25- HealthyToronto Conference Dalla Lana School of Public Health

26- Seed Library Branch Open House St. Stephen's Church, 103 Bellevue Avenue  
25-27- Beyond Green Youth Summit u of T

## **November**

5- Keith Mchenry Food Not NBombs founder spoke Harvest noon, TSL represent "Smashing Hunger, Squashing Poverty" AND Change Toronto: how to Increase Food Security 519 Church Street Community Centre  
6- Food For the Future Wilson Hall Lounge, 40 Willcocks Street  
7-10 Eastern Canada Seed growers conference  
8- TUG Meeting  
10- Ecofair at Artscape Wychwood Barns, 601 Christie Street  
12- Food Not Bombs Barrie TSL  
19- Cultivators's Meeting  
30 Permaculture Convergence Seed Exchange

## **December**

4- Cultivators meeting  
13- Unify Toronto - Design with Dialogue Moment Studio Spadina and Richmond  
14/15- Anarchist bookfair tabling, - Jacob workshop TSL and seed saving

## **2014**

### **January**

7- U of T Bees Meeting Jacob rep Earth Sciences Building  
8- TPPGTA Meeting rep  
10- TUG Meeting @Truly Local Carlisle Ave  
13- GROWCAD meeting @ OCAD  
14- Dig In meeting AND Civic Engagement Turn Out Toronto tabling  
15- Non GMO coalition meeting at Steelworkers  
21- Jacob speak Hart House Community Kitchen  
23- Scientists Right to Know federal library closures solidarity meeting Scientist for peace  
24- Conference Call Seeds of Diversity AND Green Majority Campus Radio Jacob interviewed  
25- Meeting PPGTA planning for Seeding of Eden event  
26- Seedy Zine planning meeting  
29- Indoor Gardening workshop Hart house

### **February**

2- TSL Volunteer Orientation & Seed Paper making  
8- Seeding of Eden 160 Bartley  
15-17 TSL in France Young Ecologists Jeune Ecologists Conference at Green Party of France headquarters in Paris  
Last week of Feb- Jacob in Spain Red Andaluza Semillas- cultivando biodiversidad- Sevilla – Plantaromed Biodynamic Seed Farm

### **March**

3- Cultivator's Meeting  
8- Netherlands Seed festival

- 10- Friends of the Rouge Watershed Branch Launch
- 14- Seed Packing@ Scadding Court
- 15- Jacob speak Global z day u of T
- 16- Seeding at PPGTA
- 19- Food and Race at Wilson Lounge new college
- 20- Spring Shindig U of T AND TYFPC meeting
- 21- GROWCAD Seed Bombing making and blitz
- 22- Seedy Saturday scarborough
- 29- Vandana Shiva Seed Teach in at OISE Livestream
- 30- North York Harvest and Parkdale Seedy Saturdays

## **April**

- 5- First Workshop in the TPL At Parliament Library
- 6- J talk on Climate change TSL with Elixabeth May
- 7- Tyfpc youth in food politics, TUG meetings CSI regent Park
- 10- Turnout Toronto CSI Daniels Spectrum regent park, Tabling
- 12- Seed saving workshop Annette Library with Councillor Sarah Ducette
- 15- Cultivators meeting
- 21 Food Security solidarity Month Latin American Solidarity Network at Steelworkers , j speak
- 22- OISE Julia Butterfly Hill Tree Sitter redwood 2 years rep
- 23 Friends House seed centric workshop with JB hill
- 24- Community Health Centre Earth Day Riverdale
- 25- B did LUSH Factory Seed saving workshop, Jacob interview with Green Majority U of T campus radio AND Food Nation (Foodforward) event Hart House
- 26- PPGTA meeting rep
- 27- Joe Mihevic Environment Day tabling
- 29- Seed saving Workshop at Fresh City Farms
- 30- York Woods Public Library J Seed saving workshop to Chinese Seniors

## **May**

- 1- Outreach and Seedy Zine Launch @ May Day, Allan Gardens
- 2- Apple program in Cabbage town or St James town Elementary School Seed starting saving workshop
- 9- Ecolinks Conference
- 18- Withrow Park Farmer's Market tabling
- 21- Webinar OLA presented how to start a seed library
- 22- Foodshare event??
- 25- Bed in Trinity Bellwoods, seed share Jacob
- 30- Free community food festival At Rexdale Albion Library

## **June**

- 3- First seed library t shirts made, seed cycle completed
- 4- Spring Zine Release , started working for not for profit status
- 6- seed sorting and Volunteer Orientation at Scadding Court
- 7- 1 in 100 art Festival t shirt and zine sale, Seed workshop AND People's Picnic- facilitated seed sovereignty workshop @ Trinity Bellwoods summer 2014
- 8- windfall ecology festival in newmarket jacob
- 10- Harvest Noon Branch Launch

- 12- Dewson School- seed bomb workshop
- 13- Driftwood School- Dilani Maria and I went Parents of kids at the school
- 18- Seed sorting at Foodshare 6-8
- 19- delivered Toronto Community Housing seed donation
- 24- South Riverdale Food day- tabling
- 26- People with Aids Branch Launch

## **July**

- 6- Leslieville Farmers Market tabling
- 10-Moved into Office at Foodshare
- 15- Children's program- seedlings- at Maria Shuter Library
- 16- Sharefest tabling CSI Bathurst st. IRBE, donation to Young Somali Growers
- 17- Lil bean and green daycare- seed workshop
- 18- Seed saving Art Jam at Scadding Court
- 19-20- Tabling Anarchist bookfair
- 21- Cultivator's meeting
- 29- TUG Meeting
- 31-Cultivator's meeting

## **August**

- 5- OISE Branch launched
- 8-Cultivators meeting AND Gardener's Assembly/seedy harvest @ Scadding Court
- 7- Cultivator's meeting; to Hamilton Seed library launch
- 12- OCAD Branch Launch
- 16 Eglinton West streetfest tabled in front of Maria AShuter
- 21-24-People's Social Forum in Ottawa

## **September**

- 4- Barbara Fromm Library
- 10- CARC Branch launch – community action resource centre 1652 Keele
- 23- Daily Bread Annual AGM
- 27- YIMBY at UTS tabling 11-4
- 28- Allan Gardens 12-3
- 30- Turn Out Toronto At Fairview Library

## **October**

- 1- TSLC becomes a corporation – non profit status
- 2- TUG Meeting- Brendan became Steering Committee member
- 5- Fred Hamilton Park Homegrown National Park Crawl
- 6- seed saving workshop us and Dig in Workshop at Hart House
- 7- Seed Saving workshop at the Stop & Cultivators meeting
- 8- Horticulture Lecture @Georgian college tabling
- 16- TUG Meeting, York Woods Library workshop
- 17- Seed donation to Uganda through KIDS Canada
- 23- non gmo coalition meeting
- 24/25- Guelph Transition Study, working group, seed library promotion
- 28- First Board Meeting of TSLC

30- Parliament Library Pumpkin seed saving workshop

### **November**

4- Port Credit Library Seed Saving workshop

8-Seed Saving + Permaculture event @ Tool Library East.

5- Seed packing at foodshare

15-Festival of Dangerous Ideas tabling, met Vandna Shiva second time

19- Foodfight TO at CSI Regent Park tabling

20- Seed Saving workshop at Daully Bread

21- seed donation to Ufeed downsvew greenhouse Melisianne

### **December**

6- seedy stocking stuffers

8-Cultivator's meeting

18- Daily Bread Branch Launch

### Appendix 3: Selected Photos



Toronto Seed Library Launch @City Hall- Seed-In



In the Press room being interviewed



Day of Action Against GM Alfalfa- Art Build



Public Demonstration





Toronto Tool Library, Parkdale Branch



Regenesis @York University Branch



TRY University Libraries Conference



Visit from Michael Hale (Executive Director of Biodiversity International) and family



St. Stephen's -in-the-Field Branch



Volunteer @ Foodshare Community Garden Festival, Scarborough







March Against Monsanto



TSL Cultivator Jacob addresses the crowd



Folks borrowing seeds March Against Monsanto



TSL & Toronto Tool Library @ Z-day U of T



Cultivators at The People's Picnic, Trinity Bellwoods



Banner Art Build



Seed sorting and packing @FoodShare



Seedy Elder @ the TSL office





Volunteer making TSL pins at the Toronto Tool Library East Side Makerspace



Winter Issue of the Seedy Zine



Seed Swap @ Screening of *Bitter Seeds*



Seed re-packaging work bee



@Scadding Court

Tending the seed garden





Cultivator Brendan with the TSL Seed-cycle



OISE Branch



ia and Brendan leading a Seed Saving 101 workshop @ the Seeding of Eden

Mar

#### Appendix 4 : Selected Event Posters





INVISIBLE HAND  
OF THE MARKET

## Seed Saving Workshop

Sunday, March 16, 1pm

Permaculture GTI #10  
160 Burtley Dr.

Learn the "How & Why" of seed saving. Enjoy a Potluck. Have good thyme.

Suggested Donation: \$15/PWYC

SAVE US!!!  
HELP!





## SEED SAVING WORKSHOP AND EXCHANGE

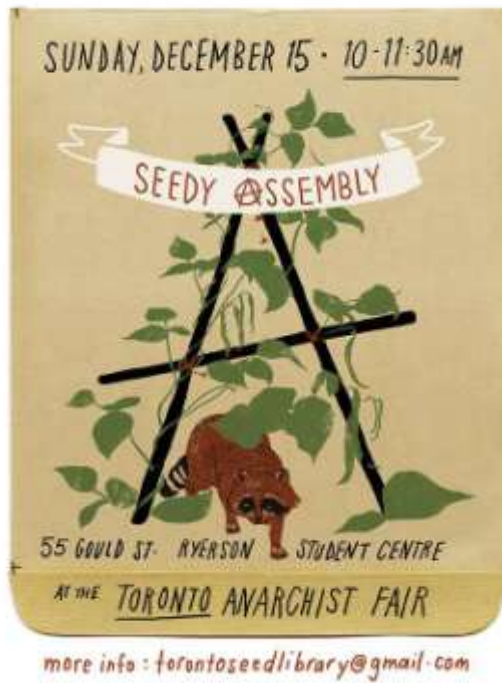
**APRIL 5  
11:30-1PM**

Join the Toronto Seed Library for seedy fun at the Parliament St Library, 269 Gerrard St E.

LET'S GET  
GROWING!!







## Seed Packing and Work Day

**Toronto Seed Library**

**Food Share**  
Good Healthy Food for All

**Feb 18. 3-8pm**  
90 Croatia St  
Entrance off of Brock St.  
Feel free to bring your own seeds

To Prepare for the upcoming Seedy Saturdays, The Toronto Seed Library will "bee" holding a seed packing, organizing, and general workday.

RSVP to Angela Elzinga Cheng  
angela@foodshare.net  
416 363 6441 ext. 247

**SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 8**

# Seeding of Eden

**2-10pm**

**PERMACULTURE GTA HQ**  
**160 BARTLEY DR.**

Growing the movement for Seed Freedom

## Seed Packing & Work Day: Part 2

**Thursday, March 5, 3-8pm**  
Foodshare — 90 Croatia St. entrance off Brock Street

RSVP to Jeanny Gonzalez  
jeanny@foodshare.net  
416 363 6441 ext. 280

After a super seed-cuestful first packing, we'll bee back at it on March 5. Drop in any thyme and help us prepare for Seedy Saturdays 2015 and enjoy some light refreshments!

**Toronto Seed Library**

**Food Share**  
Good Healthy Food for All

THE TORONTO SEED LIBRARY PRESENTS

# The Pawpaw Campaign

THIS YEAR THE TORONTO SEED LIBRARY IS PROUD TO ANNOUNCE THE LAUNCH OF A MULTI-YEAR PAWPAW PLANTING CAMPAIGN.

LEARN HOW TO PLANT, GROW & CARE FOR NORTH AMERICA'S LARGEST INDIGENOUS FRUIT!

ARTWORK BY NYLE JOHNSTON

THIS POSTER FEATURES THE ZEBRA SHALLOPFLIE BUTTERFLY, WHICH EXCLUSIVELY FEEDS ON PAWPAW LEAVES IN THE CATERPILLAR STAGE

IN 2015, THE CAMPAIGN WILL CONSIST OF THREE WORKSHOPS AND A FIELD TRIP TO THE NIAGARA REGION TO SEE PAWPAWS IN THE WILD.

COST: \$75  
TO PARTICIPATE & MORE INFO: [info@torontoseedlibrary.org](mailto:info@torontoseedlibrary.org)

**Toronto Seed Library**

**Seedy Saturdays**

**Seedy Sunday**

**Seedy Tuesday**

**Seedy Wednesday**

**Seedy Thursday**

**Seedy Friday**

**Seedy Saturday**

**Seedy Sunday**



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